

The Lukan Lens on Wealth and Possessions

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The Lukan Lens on Wealth and Possessions

*A Perspective Shaped by the Themes of Reversal and
Right Response*

By

Rachel L. Coleman



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*To “the other Rev. Dr. Coleman”:
Randy, you are the love of my life, and your unswerving belief in me is a
gift that I treasure above anything this world could offer.*

• • •

*And to the congregation of Belmont United Methodist Church:
This project is as much yours as it is mine! Thank you for being my
cheerleaders and prayer warriors from start to finish.*

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Locating the Interpretive Lens for Luke's Wealth Ethic (1:5–4:44)

This project was born in the church and its findings are offered back to the church. The pressing question that drives the inquiry arose, not in the ivory towers of academia or in a seminary classroom, but in the context of extended corporate engagement with the Gospel of Luke in local churches. In three different settings on two different continents, as groups of adult believers gathered weekly over the course of many months to read and study Luke's writings,¹ one question was asked repeatedly, sometimes with an underlying hint of frustration: "What *exactly* is Luke trying to say about material wealth?" These readers came from a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds and a wide spectrum of familiarity with Scripture, but they all noticed two things: the frequency of Luke's references to wealth and possessions, and the apparent complexity of his perspective on the economic ethics required of Jesus' disciples. It was this persistent question to which the following chapters provide an answer.

An honest admission must be made from the outset: this is not a new topic in Luke studies! A great deal of attention has been given to Luke's wealth ethic and there is a wide divergence of opinion about how to interpret the Evangelist's position. In Luke's writings—most particularly in the Gospel, but also in Acts—there seem to be competing perspectives on the role of wealth and possessions in the life of Christian disciples. On the one hand, Jesus gives commands to renounce possessions; these imperatives produce one of the distinguishing marks of discipleship for Luke.² On the other hand, there are clear teachings from the Lukan Jesus regarding the appropriate stewardship of possessions; these commands obviously assume something less than total renunciation.³ Scholars who attempt to resolve this tension between renunciation and stewardship as the driving factors in Luke's wealth ethic have focused on a variety of elements within the Lukan writings as the interpretive crux

1 I am deeply grateful for the rich and spirited dialogues with Luke and with each other in these three local church contexts: an adult Sunday School class at *La Confraternidad Cristiana Shalom* (Guayaquil, Ecuador), and "Treasure Seekers" classes at Wilmore UMC (Wilmore, KY) and Belmont UMC (Dayton, OH).

2 The most notable examples are Luke 12:33; 14:33; 18:22.

3 E.g., Luke 10:37; 12:15; 16:1–13, 19–31; 19:8–10; Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–5:11; 11:27–30.

or key for integrating the two strands of teaching. This project will show that Luke's wealth ethic may be best understood by allowing the Gospel's introductory unit (Luke 1:5–4:44) to function as the literary and theological grid that prepares the reader and provides the interpretive cues for Luke's teaching on wealth and possessions in the rest of his work.

1 The State of the Conversation

The tension between renunciation and stewardship in Luke-Acts has received abundant scrutiny in the modern and post-modern periods of biblical criticism. Proposals for integrating the two strands of Luke's theology of possessions can be divided into three broad categories.⁴ First, there are proposals that seek to resolve the tension by arguing that Luke is addressing two separate audiences, with two distinct sets of requirements. The proposals in this first category have their roots in Hans-Joachim Degenhardt's *Lukas—Evangelist der Armen*.⁵ Degenhardt argued that the Lukan Jesus issued the commands for radical renunciation only to a special class of disciples (missionaries or itinerant preachers), and that the rest of the Christian community was called to demonstrate discipleship through almsgiving and benevolence. Later social-scientific versions of a Degenhardt-style solution to the tension in Luke's wealth ethic distinguish between wandering prophets and "resident disciples,"⁶ or between "disciples" (specialists) and "people" (non-specialist followers of Jesus).⁷ However, this solution to the tension in Luke's wealth ethic

4 For alternate ways of categorizing the various proposals, see Thomas E. Phillips, *Reading Issues of Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 10–11, and Christopher M. Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 3–19.

5 Hans-Joachim Degenhardt, *Lukas—Evangelist der Armen. Besitz und Besitzverzicht in den lukanischen Schriften* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1965).

6 John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985).

7 Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986). A more recent project in this line is Brian Capper, "Jesus, Virtuoso Religion, and the Community of Goods," in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 60–80. There are other significant voices in the broader discussion of Luke's wealth ethic whose contributions do not fit neatly into any of our three categories, but whose methodological affinities are closest to those of this first group. See, e.g., Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978); Thomas Schmidt, *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels*

is based upon a restricted understanding of the term “disciple” that does not stand up under close scrutiny of the actual Lukan usage. As David Seccombe rightly observes, the word “disciples” (μαθηταί) in Luke-Acts is used of the broadest range of followers of Jesus: “μαθηταί in Luke denotes a wider group than the semi-professional band that followed Jesus on the road, and there is a natural continuity between the disciples of the Gospel and the Christians in Acts (whom Luke calls μαθηταί).”⁸

A second approach to resolving the tension between renunciation and stewardship as the formative factors in Luke's theology of wealth and possessions is to read the two strands of commands as serving different functions within Lukan thought. The calls to stewardship are understood in a literal way, as the essential and universally applicable norm for a Christian response to wealth, while the renunciation commands are read as metaphorical. Rather than an expectation that disciples will literally “sell all and give to the poor” (Luke 18:22), the calls for renunciation are taken as symbols of the wholehearted loyalty that is demanded of Jesus' followers.⁹ Rather than looking for the key to Luke's wealth ethic in a supposed hierarchy of discipleship, these critics focus more intently on how the theme functions throughout the Gospel and what it implies for all disciples of Jesus, whether rich or poor.¹⁰ Although they emphasize the metaphorical role of the renunciation theme in Luke-Acts

(Sheffield: JSNT Press, 1987); and Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988).

- 8 David P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: A. Fuchs, 1982), 14. John R. Donahue cites several examples that substantiate Seccombe's interpretation of the breadth of μαθηταί in Luke's usage: Luke 6:17; 14:12–26; Acts 6:1; 9:1. Donahue, “Two Decades of Research on the Rich and the Poor in Luke-Acts,” in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson*, ed. Peter J. Paris (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 129–144 (136).
- 9 Representatives of this approach include Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor*; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); F. W. Horn, *Glaube und Handeln in der Theologie des Lukas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983); Sondra Ely Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); and Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999).
- 10 E.g., Johnson, *Literary Function*, 202, sees the disposition of possessions as a metaphor for “the disposition of the self.” Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor*, 19, argues that the renunciation passages were intended to inculcate in the reader an attitude of “limitless discipleship.” Horn, *Glaube und Handeln*, believes that Luke inherited the renunciation passages from an earlier tradition and kept them, not as ethical mandates, but as metaphors for a proper attitude of distance toward material possessions.

as a call to undivided, passionate loyalty, these interpreters do not minimize the impact of the theme on Christian ethics and conduct.¹¹ An important question about these proposals, however, is whether or not the text of Luke-Acts itself supports the bifurcation of the two sets of Lukan instructions into literal and metaphorical categories.

The third group of proposals for resolving the question of Luke's theology of wealth and possessions is of particular interest to us, since these approaches discern within the Lukan text various key passages that provide an essential interpretive lens. Joel Green, for example,¹² who emphasizes throughout his commentary the "topos of transposition" (reversal) as the defining note in the Lukan Jesus' economic program, locates the interpretive lens for this topos in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) and the Nazareth sermon (4:18–21).¹³ James Metzger,¹⁴ on the other hand, locates the crucial interpretive lens for Luke's wealth ethic in the Travel Narrative (9:51–19:10), focusing particularly upon four uniquely Lukan parables: the wealthy landowner (12:13–21), the father and his two sons (15:11–32), the unjust steward (16:1–13), and the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31). Metzger argues that these parables, when read sequentially, form a progressive dominical critique of

11 Proposals that push toward a metaphorical understanding of renunciation have been criticized, particularly by Majority World scholars, as being "too comfortable" for affluent readers. These critics caution against minimizing the challenge of the Lukan Jesus' calls to renunciation, since the spiritual posture of divestiture ("limitless discipleship") is possible only for those who are willing to make the real, material relinquishment. See, for example, René Padilla, "Jesús y los pobres," *Certeza* 77 (1980): 151–6; Elsa Támez, *Bible of the Oppressed*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982); Julio de Santa Ana, "The Mission of the Church in a World Torn Between Poor and Rich," *IRM* 72 (1983): 20–29; and Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, eds., *God's Economy: Biblical Studies in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005).

12 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

13 See, e.g., pp. 264–65 of *The Gospel*, where Green rightly identifies the clear echoes of both the Magnificat and the Nazareth sermon in Luke's beatitudes and woes (Luke 6:20–26). Other critics also find the theme of reversal to be the central interpretive category for Luke's wealth ethic, although there is not consensus on the degree to which the reversal is purely eschatological or to which it can/should affect life in the present. See, e.g., Jacques Dupont, *Les beatitudes 2: La bonne nouvelle* (Paris: Gabalda, 1969); Walter E. Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1981); Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and J. O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (Sheffield, JSNT Press, 1991).

14 James A. Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth in Luke's Travel Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

consumption, climaxing in a harsh evaluation of wealth itself in the final parable (16:19–31).¹⁵ Metzger discerns the programmatic foundation for this series of parables in the Nazareth sermon, so his proposal is not entirely unlike that of Green.¹⁶ Christopher Hays, a third example of this approach, finds the singular key to Luke's wealth ethics in the renunciation imperative: "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Luke 14:33). According to Hays, the application of this over-arching mandate takes multiple forms in Luke's Gospel, depending on two specific factors in the life of the individual disciple: "One's *vocation* in the Kingdom of God and *relative affluence* determine the particular expression one gives to renunciation."¹⁷ These proposals move in the right direction by seeking out the interpretive keys that Luke has provided within the text itself, but their focus on a single passage or a group of passages within the Gospel remains too narrow.

2 Advancing the Conversation

I propose that Luke intends the entirety of the first four chapters of his Gospel as the interpretive lens for the rest of his narrative. That is, after the formal prologue (Luke 1:1–4),¹⁸ the large unit comprised of Luke 1:5–4:44 functions to establish themes and perspectives that will characterize the rest of the Gospel and Acts. The key to making sense of those themes, including Luke's interest in wealth and possessions, will therefore be found in the hermeneutical lens provided by this opening unit. A narrative approach to this crucial literary unit, focusing on a synchronic, sequential reading of the text, provides a clear picture of the expectations concerning wealth and possessions that Luke

15 Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth*, 14. Metzger writes from a reader-response approach, and he acknowledges openly that he is reading Luke from the perspective of and for the correction of the 21st-century Western church, which he sees caught in the grip of consumerism. See especially his page 184.

16 Ibid., 25–31.

17 Hays, 185, emphasis added.

18 I agree with those who see Luke-Acts as a unified, two-volume narrative, with the formal prologue, Luke 1:1–4, serving as the preface to both works. In addition to Green's commentary, see: Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990); Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996); François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, trans. Christine M. Thomas (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002); and David E. Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

produces in his introduction; it is this set of expectations that becomes the interpretive lens for understanding that theme in the rest of Luke's writings.¹⁹

The answer to the pressing question about Luke's wealth ethic will be developed as follows. The remainder of Chapter 1 will lay out the case for seeing the scope of Luke's programmatic introduction as Luke 1:5–4:44. Chapter 2 will then present the results of a narrative analysis of each pericope in that introductory unit, which allow us to determine the clues that Luke has provided for interpreting his perspective on wealth and possessions in the rest of the Gospel. It will be seen that in his introduction, Luke's motif of wealth and possessions is intimately connected to two reoccurring themes: reversal and right response. Chapters 3 and 4 will use the hermeneutical lens identified in Luke 1:5–4:44 to interpret twenty-three passages in the body of the Gospel (Luke 5–24) that make either explicit or implicit links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. It will be seen that in these texts there is a consistent cluster of five Lukan emphases that together shape Luke's wealth ethic. Chapter 5 will demonstrate that the same cluster of emphases is also present in Luke's second volume, giving consistency to Luke's perspective on wealth and possessions across both the Gospel and Acts. Chapter 6 will review the entire journey, lay out suggestions for further research based on the results of this study, and ask some probing questions about the church's response to the answer Luke has given to the question about his wealth ethic.

3 The Scope of Luke's Introduction: a Hermeneutically Significant Question

Before proceeding in Chapter 2 to an analysis of Luke's introductory unit, it is necessary to deal with a prior question: the scope of Luke's introduction. Interpreters have long noted that Luke's two-volume work has a dual preface: a formal, highly stylized prologue (Luke 1:1–4) followed by an extended introductory unit beginning at 1:5.²⁰ There is also a broad consensus that the Lukan introduction has been carefully crafted as intentional "stage setting" for

19 Although the central focus of this project is the final form of the text and its effect on the reader (narrative-critical concerns), the insights of redaction-critical approaches to the text will also come into play, especially in terms of highlighting the particularities of the Lukan voice regarding the motif of wealth and possessions.

20 For an excellent discussion of the abrupt change in style and vocabulary at 1:5, see Dawsey, *The Lukan Voice*, 18–19.

the themes, structure, and purpose of the larger work.²¹ Luke's introductory unit prepares the reader for what will be developed in the rest of Luke-Acts, providing an interpretive lens through which the reader engages with the larger Lukan project. However, it is more difficult to talk about a consensus view in the matter of the terminus of the Lukan introduction. The question remains contested: how far into the Gospel narrative does the introductory unit extend? Given the interpretive significance of the introduction, as a literary unit designed to present Luke's key theological themes and interests, ascertaining the parameters of that unit becomes a hermeneutically charged question.

This section will first offer a brief assessment of the three most common answers to the question about the end point of Luke's introduction. Each of the three situates the terminus of the introduction at a point in the narrative prior to the end of Luke 4.²² After evaluating these proposals, we will interact briefly with the work of three commentators who propose that Luke's introduction runs to the very end of Luke 4. Finally, we will identify and assess the interpretive implications for defining the scope of the Lukan introduction as 1:5–4:44.

3.1 *Proposals that Locate the Conclusion of Luke's Introduction Prior to 4:44*

The large majority of commentators locate the ending of the Lukan introduction at a point prior to the final verse of Luke 4. I believe that such perspectives on Luke's structure truncate unnecessarily the interpreter's vision of the hermeneutical cues that Luke provides for effective reading of his larger project.

The first such perspective reads only the infancy narratives (Luke 1:5–2:52) as introductory, with the body of the Gospel beginning at 3:1, the ministry of John the Baptist. Heinz Schürmann, Raymond Brown, and Luke Timothy Johnson are excellent representatives of this view.²³ The interesting thing is that each of these scholars, despite his "short view" of Luke's introductory unit, demonstrates an intuitive perception of the introductory and preparatory nature of the entirety of Luke 3–4.

21 For example: René Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I–II* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1964); Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1977); Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction to Luke-Acts*; and Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1–2* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993).

22 The three most commonly proposed end-points are: 2:52; 4:13; 4:30. There are also two less common proposals, which locate the terminus of Luke's introduction at either 3:38 or 4:15.

23 Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969); Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991). See also the article by Tyson, which builds on Brown's work: Joseph B. Tyson, "The Birth Narratives and the Beginning of Luke's Gospel," *Semeia* 52 (1991): 103–20.

For example, in his commentary on the Gospel, Schürmann designates Luke 1:5–2:52 as the “prelude” to the Gospel, with 3:1 signaling the true beginning of Luke’s promised *diégesis* (διήγησις, 1:1). Schürmann describes 3:1–4:44 as the first major unit in the Gospel proper, titling it “the beginning in Galilee.”²⁴ However, he also recognizes that the end of chapter four (4:14–44) plays a particularly important introductory role as a cohesive unit that summarizes the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He asserts that it is this unit (4:14–44) that is in view in the retrospective summaries of Jesus’ ministry at the end of the Gospel (Luke 23:5) and in Peter’s speech in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:34–43).²⁵ Schürmann also notes Jesus’ “programmatic self-testimony” in Nazareth (4:16–30), which affirms and corresponds to the “revelatory event” presented on his behalf in the infancy narratives.²⁶ He thus recognizes the way in which the entirety of Luke 4 functions as a preparatory lens for reading the rest of Luke-Acts.

Raymond Brown dismisses categorically any attempt to extend the introduction beyond the end of Luke 2 and asserts that Luke composed the infancy stories only after completing the rest of the Gospel. This allows him to make the astonishing claim that “none of the Lucan infancy narratives has had major influence on the body of the Gospel, so that, if the first two chapters had been lost, we could never have suspected their existence.”²⁷ Brown argues that Luke 3 was the original introduction to the Gospel, supporting this claim by noting that the placement of the genealogy in chapter three makes more sense if that chapter were originally intended to formally introduce the larger narrative.²⁸ However, if one operates without Brown’s set of assumptions concerning Luke’s compositional process, a role can be seen for the genealogy as an integral part of an introductory unit running from 1:5–4:44. In its Lukan setting, the genealogy forms the middle element in a triad of pericopae—baptism (3:21–22), genealogy (3:23–38), and temptation (4:1–13)—which establishes Jesus’ identity as “son of God.” The sonship element runs right through the three pericopae,²⁹ and the genealogy is woven seamlessly into Luke’s opening portrait of the adult Jesus as Son of God, which parallels the presentation of the infant Jesus in Luke 1–2. The genealogy is also closely linked to the

24 Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 146.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 221, my translation.

27 Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 240.

28 Brown also notes that (1) Luke 3:1–2 compares well with historiographic introductions in contemporary Greek literature and (2) Mark and John open their Gospels with narratives about Jesus’ baptism. Brown, *The Birth*, 240.

29 Luke 3:22, 23, 38; 4:3, 9.

remainder of chapter four through its clear emphasis on the universal reach of Jesus' impact. The "son of Adam, son of God" of the genealogy pairs with and prepares the way for Jesus' declaration of a ministry impact that will extend beyond the confines of Israel in 4:20–27.³⁰

Like Schürmann and Brown, Luke Johnson places the opening of the narrative proper at Luke 3:1, after the introductory infancy narratives.³¹ However, despite Johnson's truncation of the Lukan introductory unit at 2:52, his own insightful comments on specific passages within Luke 3 and 4 lend support to the extension of the Lukan introduction beyond the limits of the infancy narratives. First, Johnson notes the stage-setting quality of the Nazareth pericope, which demonstrates Luke's hand in both its location and content: "The passage is made into a programmatic prophecy which guides the reader's understanding of the subsequent narrative."³² Second, Johnson notices the change of pace in the narrative at 4:31, as the "rapid series of vignettes" (4:31–44) offer the reader a glimpse of a "day in the life of the Messiah," in which "the announced program of the Prophet to 'free captives' begins to be carried out in these 'liberations' of those captive to spiritual and physical sickness."³³ Inseparably paired with the Nazareth sermon and its aftermath, these healings serve as *preparatio* for the rest of Luke's narrative. Third, and perhaps most telling, Johnson notes Luke's placement of the call of the disciples at 5:1. The postponement of that event in the narrative, in comparison with its location in Mark and Matthew, strengthens the case for extending the Lukan introduction all the way to 4:44. As will be seen, the call of the disciples (5:1–11) signals a definitive new beginning in the Third Gospel and is one of the strongest pieces of evidence for seeing the terminus of the introduction as 4:44.

Schürmann, Brown, and Johnson all demonstrate insights into Luke's structure that belie their own decisions to include only the infancy narratives in the Gospel's introduction. There is a consistent recognition of the preparatory character of Luke 3 and 4. The question that remains is, how far into Luke 4 does the introduction extend?

A second answer to that question about the scope of the Lukan introduction is the closest thing to a "majority view." This is the perspective that the unit

30 The "son of" in the opening verse of the genealogy stands at the head of a series of 75 genitive phrases, which ends where the divine announcement in 3:22 had begun: [υἱός] τοῦ θεοῦ. It is as if the entirety of the intervening genealogy is one long parenthesis, with the simple declaration: ὢν υἱός ... τοῦ θεοῦ.

31 Johnson, *The Gospel*, 16.

32 Ibid., 81.

33 Ibid., 85.

concludes at Luke 4:13, with the story of Jesus' temptation.³⁴ This view divides Luke's introduction into two sections: the annunciation and birth narratives (1:5–2:52) and the narratives of preparation for public ministry (3:1–4:13).

Four basic arguments are offered to support Luke 4:13 as the end point of the Gospel's introduction. The first of these is undoubtedly the strongest: after 4:13, Jesus enters into public ministry, beginning in Capernaum and Nazareth and then into the larger Galilean region. The greatest problem for this first argument is that it fails to give full value to the obviously programmatic role of the Nazareth pericope and its illustrative sequel in Luke's arrangement. Even commentators who espouse these parameters for Luke's introductory unit do not fail to notice the anticipatory or preparatory nature of the event in Nazareth. Garland, for example, calls the Nazareth scene (4:14–30) a "frontispiece" to Jesus' public ministry.³⁵ Bock calls Luke 4:14–15 "an introductory summary of Jesus' activity" and 4:16–30 "an initial representative description of his teaching."³⁶ But when the Nazareth pericope is separated from the introduction and made the opening scene in the first large literary unit *after* the introduction, its anticipatory or stage-setting function is limited exclusively to the Galilean ministry of Jesus (4:14–9:50), rather than to the whole of Jesus' ministry in the Third Gospel.³⁷

The second argument for seeing the terminus of the introduction at Luke 4:13 is that Luke's easily discernible geographical interest comes into play at 4:14, with a unit on Galilee (4:14–9:50) followed by the long central section, which is loosely organized around the journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44).³⁸ The question is whether the geographical motif in the Third Gospel begins at 4:14, thereby clearly establishing 4:14–44 as the opening scene of a major unit on Galilee. In reality, the Galilee-Jerusalem alternation does not actually begin at 4:14, but is in fact already present in the infancy narratives, where the focus shifts from an angelic annunciation in Jerusalem (1:5–25) to another that takes place in

34 Major Lukan commentators who espouse this view: Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981); Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); Green, *The Gospel* (1997); John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000); Bovon, *Luke 1* (2002); Walter Radl, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas: Kommentar. Erster Teil: 1,1–9,50* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003); David E. Garland, *Luke* (2011).

35 Garland, *Luke*, 189.

36 Bock, *Luke* 1:331.

37 Marshall, although committed to placing the terminus of Luke's introduction at 4:13, notes some of the difficulties this poses for understanding the role of the rest of Luke 4 and has to resort to arguing for lack of structural clarity on Luke's part to maintain the unit break at 4:13. See especially *The Gospel*, 175.

38 See Bock, *Luke* 1:346, and Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 197.

Galilee (1:26–38).³⁹ Furthermore, the geographical focus of 4:14–44 may not be exclusively Galilee-centered, if “in the synagogues of Judea” (4:44) is taken as a straightforward geographical reference.⁴⁰ This point weakens the geographical argument for a definitive ending to the introduction at 4:13.

Third, it is argued that setting the end-point at Luke 4:13 allows the second half of the introduction (3:1–4:13) to have a John-Jesus parallel structure that echoes the alternating stories of the infancy narratives. This is an important insight. The beginning of Jesus' ministry is linked to John through his baptism, but from that point Luke slowly builds the case for Jesus' superiority as the Spirit-filled Son of God.⁴¹ The question, however, is whether the effectiveness of the John-Jesus parallels in Luke 1–4 requires terminating the Gospel's introduction at 4:13. In reality, the actualization of Jesus' identity and vocation that takes place in 4:14–44 serves to heighten the reader's awareness of Jesus' superiority over John. This effect appears to be the goal of the parallelism throughout the introduction. Therefore, extending the Lukan introduction as far as 4:44 actually maximizes the effectiveness of this compositional strategy.

Finally, the fourth argument for setting the terminus of the introduction at Luke 4:13 is that a break after Jesus' victory over Satan in the desert focuses the reader's attention on two elements crucial to Jesus' preparation for ministry: his identity as God's Son and his experience of the Spirit.⁴² Once again, this is a keen insight into an important aspect of Luke's introduction: the establishment of Jesus' identity as the Spirit-empowered Son of God. However, the effect of this correctly perceived emphasis is actually heightened when the ministry summary (4:14–15), the Nazareth episode (4:16–30), and the illustrative healing and teaching episodes (4:31–44) are included as part of the introduction. The character of the message and the ministry activities of the Spirit-anointed Son of God is revealed in Luke 4:14–44 in a way that clearly sets the stage for the rest of Luke's story.

Although terminating the Lukan introduction at 4:13 is a majority view, the evidence marshalled in support of that view is not without weaknesses. In fact, as was also the case in the arguments for setting the terminus after the infancy narratives, many of these interpreters' best exegetical insights about the Lukan

39 Robert Morgenthaler, *Die lukanische Geschichtsschreibung als Zeugnis: Gestalt und Gehalt der Kunst des Lukas*, 2 vols. (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1949), 165.

40 See Nolland, *Luke* 1:186. For a discussion of the possible range of meanings of εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς τῆς Ἰουδαίας and its variants (τῶν Ἰουδαίων, τῆς Γαλιλαίας), see Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1:557–58.

41 See Green, *The Gospel*, 159, and Nolland, *Luke* 1:136.

42 See especially Green, *The Gospel*, 184–85.

introduction are actually strengthened when the entirety of Luke 4 is included in the introduction to the Gospel.

Finally, there is a third proposal that situates the end-point of the introductory unit at Luke 4:30, the conclusion of the Nazareth episode. This view of the introduction assigns the illustrative vignettes that follow (4:31–44) to the first major section of the Gospel.⁴³ Two basic arguments are set forth in defense of this proposal.

First, there is the insight that the Lukan introduction provides a series of “witnesses” to Jesus’ identity. E. Earle Ellis, in particular, has advanced this interpretive line, in which Jesus’ self-witness in Nazareth to his messianic identity serves as the climax of the introduction.⁴⁴ What Ellis fails to note is that the “witness” motif continues to the very end of chapter four, with the wordless witness of the healings (4:39, 40) and the explicit witness of the unclean spirits (4:34, 41).

Second, Paul Minear argues for the theological “homogeneity” of 1:5–4:30, as a tightly woven, “pervasively eschatological” introductory unit that anticipates “the whole period of Jesus’ ministry and of the life of the church.”⁴⁵ Minear makes the keen observation that, in Luke’s construction of the first four chapters of his Gospel, “each prophetic message opens the way to the whole sequence of events which follows, each message a programmatic announcement of God’s whole design.”⁴⁶ It is precisely here that Minear’s insight points to seeing the entirety of Luke 4 as an integral part of the introduction. The “prophetic message” of Nazareth (4:16–30) does indeed open the way to the whole sequence of illustrative events which take place immediately in the narrative (4:31–44). The announcement in Nazareth is given programmatic expression in the healing and exorcisms at the end of Luke 4 and the two sections—announcement and illustrative vignettes—function together as a prophetic anticipation of Jesus’ ministry in the rest of Luke-Acts.

43 Proponents of this view include: Morgenthaller, *Die lukanische Geschichtsschreibung*; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1964); Paul S. Minear, “Luke’s Use of the Birth Stories,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, ed. Leander Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1966), 111–130; E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1983); and C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*.

44 Ellis, *The Gospel*, 84, lists the witnesses in the Lukan introduction as: the witness in the temple (Luke 2:41–52), the witness of John the Baptist (3:1–20), the witness of the baptism (3:21, 22), the witness of the genealogy (3:23–38), the witness of the temptation (4:1–13), and the witness (manifestation) at Nazareth (4:14–30).

45 Minear, “Luke’s Use of the Birth Stories,” 125.

46 Ibid.

None of the arguments for setting the terminus of Luke's introduction at a point prior to 4:44 have proven unassailable; in fact, in several cases, the keen hermeneutical insights behind these arguments are actually strengthened and enhanced by extending the introductory unit to the end of Luke 4. Now it is time to build a strong case for seeing the entirety of Luke 1–4 as the intentionally-crafted, literarily- and theologically-unified introduction to the Gospel.

3.2 *The Lukan Introduction Encompasses the Entirety of Luke 4*

Fearghus Ó Fearghail has devoted an entire monograph, *The Introduction to Luke-Acts*, to the thesis that the scope of Luke's introduction is Luke 1:5–4:44.⁴⁷ Ó Fearghail sets forth several compelling pieces of evidence in defense of the literary unity of Luke 1:5–4:44, which he sees as the cohesive introduction to Luke's two-volume work.⁴⁸ Some of this evidence is internal to Luke 1–4; other insights come from patterns observable in Luke 5–24 that in some way set the body of the Gospel apart from the introductory unit.

First, and perhaps most importantly, Ó Fearghail correctly notes that the John-Jesus parallel introduced in the infancy narratives runs to the very end of Luke 4, climaxing in the contrast between the mission of the Baptist and the mission of the Son of God. It is in the series of messianic wonders in Luke 4:31–44 that the Evangelist achieves the climax of the portrait of Jesus' superiority that has been the goal of the powerful, imbalanced parallels between the two figures. In my estimation, without the extension of this purposeful parallelism in Luke 3–4, one might have to question why Luke spent so much time on John in the infancy narratives.⁴⁹

Second, Ó Fearghail notices two Lukan emphases that are concentrated in the first four chapters of the Gospel: the Holy Spirit and the divine sonship. Luke's emphasis on the Spirit is much more overt and frequent in these four chapters than in the rest of the Gospel, and the pairing of the Spirit with guidance (Luke 2:27; 4:1b, 14) and with power (δύναμις, 1:35; 4:14),

47 Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction to Luke-Acts* (1991). Two commentators who are also significant voices here are Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: 1986) and Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*.

48 Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 38, correctly divides the introductory unit into two parallel sections: 1:5–2:52 and 3:1–4:44.

49 As Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 36, notes, "By comparing the two figures with respect to their identity and mission Luke brings the uniqueness of Jesus into sharper focus. Indeed, the greater the role attributed to John, the more the uniqueness of Jesus emerges."

while common in Acts, is a pattern not overtly present in Luke 5–24.⁵⁰ As mentioned above, the motif of Jesus’ divine sonship is a unifying thread in Luke’s introduction, and Ó Fearghail notes that it is present in a much more concentrated form in Luke 1–4 than in the rest of the Gospel.⁵¹ He points out that this sonship motif runs straight through to the end of chapter four (see 4:41), thus lending support to seeing the end point of the Lukan introduction at 4:44.

Third, Ó Fearghail also observes accurately that the Lukan emphasis on discipleship emerges clearly as a new theme beginning in Luke 5.⁵² From Luke 5:1–11 onward, the reader can perceive the Gospel writer’s special interest in the Twelve and their role as eyewitnesses. Several words related to disciples and discipleship make their first appearance in Luke 5: “to follow” (ἀκολουθεῖν, 5:11); “Master” (ἐπιστάτα, 5:5), the title most commonly used for Jesus by disciples in Luke; “disciple” (μαθητής, 5:30); and the phrase “the word (of God)” (ὁ λόγος [τοῦ θεοῦ]), which, beginning in 5:1, is most often found in Luke in contexts of hearing and responding to Jesus’ message.⁵³ This is a clear indication of a new beginning in the narrative. When this new beginning at 5:1 is set alongside the climax of the purposeful John-Jesus parallels in 4:31–44, there is very strong evidence for seeing a definitive break between the introduction and the main body of the Gospel at 4:44.

Fourth, Ó Fearghail also highlights an important cluster of theologically significant vocabulary in Luke 1–4—“holy” (ἅγιος), “Christ” (Χριστός), “it is necessary” (δεῖ), and “to proclaim good news” (εὐαγγελιζεσθαι). This group of terms provides a special thematic matrix for the Lukan introduction, particularly for its portrait of Jesus. “Holy,” in direct reference to Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, is found only in 1:35 and 4:34.⁵⁴ “Christ,” applied directly to Jesus, and the divine imperative (δεῖ), in reference to Jesus’ mission, both appear in Luke 1–4, and neither is used in that way again until Peter’s confession and Jesus’ prediction

50 Occurrences of (Holy) Spirit in the introduction: 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25, 26, 27; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18. Outside the introduction the instances are few: 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12.

51 “The occurrences of the theme [of sonship] elsewhere in the gospel are easily listed: 8:28 on the lips of a demon, 9:35 in the words of the heavenly voice, and 22:70 in a sinister question on the lips of the members of the council.” Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 32.

52 “The continuous presence associated with apostleship only begins in 5:1–11.” Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 37.

53 See, for example, the emphasis on “hearing the word” in the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4–15). Other examples include: Luke 5:15, 22; 6:18, 47, 49; 7:3, 29; 10:24; 11:28; 14:35. In Acts, the “word of God” is found frequently in reference to the message about Jesus; see, for example, Acts 4:31; 6:2, 7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 46; 17:13; 18:11.

54 See Ó Fearghail’s discussion, *The Introduction*, 33.

of his passion and death in Luke 9.⁵⁵ And half the Lukan uses of εὐαγγελίζεσθαι are found in Luke 1–4.⁵⁶ This concentrated cluster of vocabulary, directly related to the portrait of Jesus that Luke is establishing in his introduction, speaks strongly to the purposeful unity of the first four chapters of the Gospel.

Finally, Ó Fearghail's understanding of the structure of rest of Luke's Gospel (5:1–24:53) also supports a definitive break between the end of the introduction at Luke 4:44 and the beginning of the Gospel proper at 5:1. He demonstrates that Luke 5:1–24:53 is a cohesive literary unit,⁵⁷ made up of three smaller and equally cohesive sections, ordered geographically: "in Galilee" (5:1–9:50), "on the way to Jerusalem" (9:51–19:48), and "in Jerusalem" (20:1–24:53). This, I believe, is the most adequate explanation of the relationship between Luke's interest in geography and the structure of his Gospel. This demonstrable literary unity of Luke 5–24 is another piece of evidence setting it apart from an introduction that runs through 4:44.

While other aspects of Ó Fearghail's work with Luke have been sharply critiqued, even his strongest critics recognize the persuasive quality of his exegesis and structural insights about Luke 1–4.⁵⁸ His perception of the theological and literary unity of Luke 1:5–4:44, the definitive new beginning at 5:1, and the literary unity of 5:1–24:53 are key pieces of evidence in establishing that the scope of the Lukan introduction is indeed 1:5–4:44. As Ó Fearghail says, the Lukan introduction prepares the reader for the rest of Luke-Acts, presenting "the programme for the work" and a "wealth of Lucan themes" which anticipate and foreshadow the person and mission of Jesus.⁵⁹

4 Interpretive Implications

The evidence is solid for seeing all of Luke 4 as part of the intentional and carefully crafted introduction to Luke-Acts. This evidence can be synthesized

55 Χριστός in Luke 1–4, applied directly or indirectly to Jesus, occurs at Luke 2:11, 26; 3:15; 4:41. It is not found again until 9:20. Δεῖ, in reference to the mission of Jesus in Luke 1–4, is found at Luke 2:49; 4:43. It does not occur again in this way until Luke 9:22. See Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 32.

56 Luke 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18, 43. Outside the introduction, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι occurs in 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16 and 20:1.

57 One of Ó Fearghail's arguments for the literary unity of 5:1–24:53 rests on his observation of the literary relationship that exists between 5:1–11 and chapter 24, forming a kind of *inclusio* around Luke 5–24. For his discussion, see Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 39.

58 See, e.g., the reviews of Ó Fearghail by Loveday Alexander, *JTS* 44 (1993): 252, and David B. Gowler, *CBQ* 55 (1993): 397–98.

59 Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 183.

into three principal categories. First, the John-Jesus parallelism achieved in the infancy narratives (Luke 1–2) is intensified and made more effective when all of Luke 3–4 is taken as the second half of the introduction. Second, there is a definitive and easily perceptible new beginning that takes place at 5:1, as Luke's focus turns from Jesus alone to Jesus in the company of disciples. Third, the impressive cluster of themes, motifs, and key vocabulary in Luke 1–4, along with the structural parallelism, functions to set these chapters together as a cohesive literary unit that sets the stage for the rest of the Gospel (and Acts).

With that stage set, it is time to examine the hermeneutical implications. If Luke 1:5–4:44 is the introductory unit that establishes the interpretive lens for reading the rest of Luke-Acts, what does that unit reveal about Luke's perspective on wealth and possessions? Chapter 2 presents an analysis of that motif in Luke 1:5–4:44.

What Luke's Introduction Reveals: the Motif of Wealth and Possessions Is Linked to the Themes of Reversal and Right Response

Chapter 1 established solid arguments for setting the parameters of Luke's introduction to the Gospel as 1:5–4:44. That introductory unit provides the hermeneutical lens for themes and emphases in the rest of Luke's narrative, including his message about wealth and possessions. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to identify how Luke presents the motif of wealth and possessions within his introduction. The analysis will show that Luke's introduction prepares the reader to understand his teaching on wealth and possessions as an integral part of his larger interest in reversal and right response, the twin themes in Luke's portrait of God's saving work in Jesus.

1 Structure as Organizer: Three Panels of Weighted Parallels

There is nothing inevitable about where and how a narrative begins. The manner in which an author or narrator introduces the tale is “neither trivial nor preliminary” but highly significant for how the remainder of the narrative will take shape.¹ So the proper place to begin an exploration of Luke's teaching on wealth and possessions is by asking what he says about them in his carefully crafted introduction (Luke 1:5–4:44).

Luke's introduction begins abruptly after the prologue (1:1–4), with a drastic shift from polished Hellenistic Greek to a Septuagint-flavored language and style.² From the opening words of Luke 1:5 (“there was in the days of Herod King of Judea a certain priest named Zechariah”),³ the reader is plunged into the language and thought world of the Old Testament (particularly,

1 Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1–2* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 28. See also Robert C. Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke's Story: Essays on Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2005), 48.

2 “There is a Septuagintal flavor to this section: here is storytelling with an antique ring—without a doubt we are dealing with a biblical-style discourse.” W. H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 114.

3 Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἱερεὺς τις ὀνόματι Ζαχαρίας, translation mine.

of the LXX).⁴ As a result, Luke's story becomes a conscious continuation and fulfillment of Israel's story, with events flowing according to the norms and patterns of the Old Testament narrative.⁵

Structurally, Luke's introduction is organized as a series of three panels (1:5–56; 1:57–2:52; 3:1–4:44), each setting out parallels between John the Baptist and Jesus. I have deliberately chosen the designation “panel” for these three main divisions of Luke's introduction, since it evokes an image of three paintings or three tapestries hung together, producing a visual representation of their relationship as three parts of an integrated, unified whole. Each of Luke's panels is an artistic achievement in its own right, but when taken together, the three produce a whole new reaction for readers. The common themes and relationships among the panels evoke an impression that is larger than the sum of its parts.

The three panels of the Lukan introduction may be outlined as follows:

First Panel: Conception [1:5–56]

- A. John the Baptist (1:5–25)
- B. Jesus (1:26–56)

Second Panel: Birth, Presentation, and Boyhood [1:57–2:52]

- A. John the Baptist (1:57–80)
 - 1. Birth (1:57–58)
 - 2. Presentation and hymn (1:59–79)
 - 3. Summary of boyhood and youth (1:80)
- B. Jesus (2:1–52)
 - 1. Birth (2:1–20)
 - 2. Presentation and hymn (2:21–38)
 - 3. Summary of boyhood (2:39–40)
 - 4. Episode from youth (2:41–51)⁶
 - 5. Summary of youth (2:52)

Third Panel: The Mission of John and Jesus [3:1–4:44]

- A. John (3:1–20)
 - 1. Preparation for ministry, anchored in Isaiah text (3:1–6)
 - 2. John's preaching (3:7–17)
 - 3. Response of opposition (3:18–20)

4 Roth asserts that the LXX is the “extra-textual repertoire” upon which Luke's readers draw to fill narrative gaps and to assign meaning to symbols. S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 80, 89.

5 For Luke, “the beginning of his narrative is clearly not the beginning of the story. Rather, it is the continuation of an older story concerning God and his people Israel.” Peter Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation of Isaiah in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 63.

6 Luke includes no parallel episode from John the Baptist's youth; once again, both the length and the content of Jesus' side of the parallel lend emphasis to his superiority. See Darrell Bock, *Luke*, 2 vol. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 1:49, 68.

B. Jesus (3:21–4:44)

1. Preamble—baptism, genealogy, temptation (3:21–4:15)
2. Preparation for ministry, anchored in Isaiah text (4:16–21)
3. Jesus' preaching (4:22–27)
4. Response of opposition (4:28–30)
5. Illustration of message and mission (4:31–44)

The first two panels of the introduction—a diptych covering Luke 1–2—present the parallel accounts of the conception, birth, and childhood of the two main characters, while the third panel (Luke 3–4) sets them in contrast as adults in public ministry. The comparisons between John the Baptist and Jesus in each panel, weighted by content and length to favor Jesus, serve to emphasize the superiority of Jesus' identity and mission. In this weighted parallelism, every affirmation made about John is heightened or surpassed in the subsequent parallel affirmation about Jesus.⁷ As noted in Chapter 1, the extension of Luke's introductory unit through 4:44 is essential for achieving the intensification of this parallelism with its resulting emphasis on the identity and mission of Jesus, since the Nazareth sermon (4:16–30) and its action-packed sequel (4:31–44) show the adult Jesus eclipsing the adult John in both word and deed.

The three panels of the Lukan introduction provide the organizational element for the analysis in this chapter. It will be seen that all three panels contain clues to guide the reader in the interpretation of Luke's perspective on wealth and possessions, which will be a persistent motif in the Third Gospel.⁸ I will examine those clues panel by panel and then synthesize the message conveyed to the reader when the three sets of clues are read together in the context of the entire Lukan introduction.

2 The First Panel of Luke's Introduction: Conception (Luke 1:5–56)

The first panel of Luke's introduction (1:5–56, the conception narratives) pairs with the second panel (1:57–2:52, birth, presentation and boyhood stories), to form a diptych encompassing the Lukan "infancy narratives."⁹ All the material

7 See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 15.

8 The use of "reader" does not discount the probability that the initial recipients of the Gospel of Luke may have been "listeners" rather than readers. Rather than use the awkward reader/hearer designation, this project will use "reader(s)" to encompass those who experienced the Gospel's message through both audition and *lectio*.

9 Although there is a rich body of critical literature directed to the fascinating question of the origins and underlying traditions of Luke's infancy narratives, our analysis will be concerned with their canonical form.

in these narratives is unique to Luke and therefore of special importance when discerning themes and emphases that are of particular interest to the author of Luke-Acts. As Raymond Brown has shown in his magisterial work, *The Birth of the Messiah*, Luke obviously thought this material had an appropriate introductory relationship to the rest of his Gospel story, not only narratively but also theologically.¹⁰ This section and the next one will show how Luke's theological presentation in the infancy narratives prepares the reader for his message about wealth and possessions in the rest of the Gospel.¹¹

Narrowing the interpretive focus to the first panel of the introduction, the conception narratives (1:5–56), we will see that Luke produces a carefully drawn portrait of reversal and right response that forms the underlying support for the rest of the introduction.¹² First, the annunciations signal that God's startling new work of redemption is going to entail a reversal of expectations and conditions. For our purposes, reversal will be defined as the overturning of expectations about how God works and about appropriate human response to that work.¹³ In the first panel of the introduction, this reversal is seen in the contrast between the two sets of parents and is then intensified and made explicit in Mary's song (1:45–55). Second, the theme of right response to God's saving work is also highlighted in the contrast between Zechariah and Mary, and, in subtler tones, in the contrast between Zechariah and Elizabeth.

2.1 *The Two Sets of Parents who Receive Angelic Announcements* (Luke 1:5–45)

The parallel annunciation accounts focus on the divinely commissioned offspring, John (Luke 1:5–25) and Jesus (1:26–45), and serve a christological

10 Brown writes of Luke 1–2: "One is hard-pressed to find elsewhere in the Gospels theology so succinctly and imaginatively presented." Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1977), 38. See also François Bovon, *Luke*, 2 vol., trans. Christine M. Thomas (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 1:30.

11 The proper use of wealth and possessions is not the only Lukan theme for which the ground is laid in the introduction to the Gospel. For a fuller discussion of how the infancy narrative in particular carries Luke's theological emphases *in nuce*, see Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, pp. 241–43. See also Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–21, and Stein, *Luke*, 78–79.

12 Reversal is a key element in the analysis of Luke's teaching on wealth and possessions, and we will come back to it repeatedly in this and subsequent chapters. For a concise discussion of the theme of reversal in Luke-Acts, see Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 264–65. For a monograph-length treatment of the theme, see John O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (Sheffield: JSNT Press, 1991).

13 Karl A. Kuhn defines reversal similarly as "the inversion of culturally endorsed norms and worldviews." *The Kingdom according to Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 193.

function, drawing the reader's attention to the identity and mission of Jesus. There is, however, another effect of the carefully drawn parallel presentations: the reader is given an initial glimpse into Luke's understanding of a right response to God's work in Jesus. This might be called the discipleship function of the parallelism in the first panel of the introduction, with Mary serving as the exemplar of faithful response.¹⁴

As the two annunciation stories unfold, there is no explicit statement about material wealth, either by the narrator or in the speech of the angel. There is, however, a clear indication that Luke is telling a story that will overturn a host of business-as-usual expectations, including assumptions about status and honor. The reversal elements woven subtly into the story of the two sets of parents are then highlighted and given a more explicitly socio-economic thrust in Mary's canticle.

The first thing noticed by even a casual reader of the two annunciation scenes is their striking similarity, both with each other and with the pattern of birth announcements from the Old Testament.¹⁵ Clear echoes are heard of the divine announcements of the conception and birth of Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Samson, and Samuel.¹⁶ Both times that Gabriel appears in Luke 1—first to Zechariah, then to Mary—all the “standard” elements of such annunciations are present: the entrance of the heavenly messenger; the perplexity of the recipients; the delivery of the heavenly message; the objection of the recipients; and the gift of reassurance, sometimes with a sign.¹⁷ It is, in fact, this striking similarity between the two annunciations that serves to highlight their differences.

The contrast between the two birth announcements in Luke 1 is discernible in six interrelated elements: (1) the lineage of the recipients; (2) the socio-economic status of the recipients; (3) the gender of the recipients; (4) the locations of the announcements; (5) the responses to the divine visitation; and (6) the timing of the songs of response to God's promised work. Careful

14 On the discipleship purpose of the parallels in Luke 1, see Roberto Simons, “La pregunta de María (Lucas 1:34),” *Kairós* 36 (2005): 51–64 [61].

15 Jaroslav Rindos also notes an important parallel with the call of Moses, since ὡφθῆ δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου (Luke 1:11) occurs only once in the LXX, at Exodus 3:2. Its presence in Luke's infancy story, therefore, signals “the start of an Exodus-like liberation.” Rindos, *He of Whom It Is Written: John the Baptist and Elijah in Luke*, OBS 38 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 47.

16 Gen 15:1–6 (angelic “fear not,” v. 1; questions about how the promise will be fulfilled, v. 2); 18:9–13 (advanced aged of the prospective parents, v. 11; incredulity, v. 12); Judg 13:2–7 (barrenness, vs. 2–3; a son set apart for a special divine assignment, vs. 5–6); 1 Sam 1:17–28 (a barren woman's prayer answered, v. 17; sadness and reproach taken away, v. 18).

17 For more on the pattern of biblical annunciation scenes, see James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 41, and Bovon, *Luke* 1, 43.

analysis of these elements will make clear that the contrast Luke is drawing between the two sets of parents is far more nuanced than a simple juxtaposition of a positive example with its negative counterpart. Both sets of parents are members of the cadre of admirable characters in the Lukan introduction,¹⁸ but within their parallel stories, a definite line of contrast is established through the six elements mentioned above. This contrast creates a powerful counter-current that flows beneath the surface similarities of the two accounts. This countercurrent draws the reader's attention to the unexpected lineage, status, gender, and geographical location of Mary, the first person in Luke's Gospel who responds appropriately to the divine initiative.

2.1.1 First Element of Contrast: the Lineage of the Recipients

The very first thing Luke tells the reader about Zechariah and Elizabeth is that they are both of the priestly lineage (Luke 1:5). In addition to that information about their ethno-religious identity, Luke gives a glimpse into their character. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth are "righteous before God" and "blameless," consistently "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord" (1:6). For readers familiar with the story of Israel, the combination of priestly lineage and genuine piety, coupled with the statement of their problem (no child, barren, advanced in age), prompts an immediate expectation of divine intervention on their behalf.¹⁹ The particular "impossibility" that righteous Zechariah and Elizabeth face links them immediately with Abraham and Sarah, the patriarch and matriarch of Israel (Gen 15:2; 18:11–12). The narrative clues alert Luke's reader to expect the same kind of divine action on behalf of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

In contrast to the portrait of Zechariah and Elizabeth's religious lineage and moral character, Luke presents the other set of parents with a certain ambiguity. Mary is presented almost as if she were an orphan, with no family circle to provide either protection or honor.²⁰ Joseph does not even appear as a character in Luke's annunciation stories; he remains a part of the backdrop, a shadowy figure whose role is to provide a Davidic pedigree for Jesus and a husband for Mary. Luke has carefully arranged this material to highlight the role of the young woman of unknown lineage. Luke's reader begins to perceive

18 Reid notes that Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary all function, to one degree or another, as prophets in Luke 1–2. Barbara Reid, "An Overture to the Gospel of Luke," *CurTM* 39 (2012): 428–34.

19 "The narrative of barrenness itself becomes grounds for anticipating the gift of a child." Green, *The Gospel*, 66. See also James G. Williams, "The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes," *JOT* 17 (1980): 107–119.

20 See Green, *The Gospel*, 61.

that this is a story of God moving in unusual ways, outside the stereotypical scenario with its standard set of expectations.

2.1.2 Second Element of Contrast: the Socio-Economic Status of the Recipients

In addition to the contrast in lineage of the two sets of parents, there is also a contrast in their socio-economic status. While Luke gives few explicit details about the social and economic status of either Zechariah and Elizabeth or Mary and Joseph, there are several hints scattered through the conception narratives that provide important clues. Zechariah and Elizabeth, with their priestly pedigree (Luke 1:5), are persons of stability and significant social status.²¹ Zechariah's honor as a Jewish priest is compounded by his marriage to a woman who was also "a descendant of Aaron" (Luke 1:5), the ideal family line of a sacerdotal spouse.²² Zechariah and Elizabeth, then, possessed multiple status markers—religious purity (they are called "righteous" and "blameless" in 1:5), family heritage, and priestly vocation. And when the reader meets Zechariah, he is on the public stage—officiating at a ritual on behalf of the whole people, with a crowd gathered outside, awaiting his exit from the sanctuary (Luke 1:10, 21). It is, after all, in the public arena where honor or status is acquired and maintained.²³ Taken in its entirety, the portrait of Zechariah and Elizabeth communicates the image of persons of good repute, high status, and socio-economic stability.

Mary, on the other hand, as an unmarried girl has no social status of her own. Despite the efforts of some commentators to make much of her "clan status" via Luke's mention of her vague family relationship to Elizabeth (Luke 1:36),²⁴

21 Priests "enjoyed the divine imprimatur, for [they] were set apart by God, had unrivaled access to holy places and paraphernalia, pronounced blessing on God's behalf and had roles of scriptural interpretation and instruction among the people." Green, *The Gospel*, 64. Even commentators like Esa Autero, who locates Zechariah much lower on the socio-economic scale of first-century Palestine, recognize that society would still ascribe "high status and honor to Zechariah, especially in terms of religious purity, his advanced age, and status within the small community." Autero, "Social Status in Luke's Infancy Narrative: Zechariah the Priest," *BTB* 41 (2011): 36–45.

22 The minimum requirement for a priest's wife was that the woman be of undisputed Israelite background (Lev 21:14–15), but having a wife of Aaronic descent was considered a high privilege, something that strengthened the priestly pedigree of her husband. See, e.g., Bock, *Luke* 1, 76; Bovon, *Luke* 1, 33; and Edwards, *The Gospel*, 33.

23 See Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 25–66 (26).

24 E.g., Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Symbolic Universe of Luke-Acts: 'They Turn the World Upside Down,'" in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 271–304 [289].

the evangelist's portrait of Mary clearly emphasizes her utter lack of status and privilege.²⁵ She has not yet moved from her unnamed father's home into Joseph's home (Luke 1:27; Matt 1:18), and nothing is said of the socio-economic status of either of those men, from whom her own status would be derived.²⁶ Mary's initial perplexity in the encounter with Gabriel clearly has to do with the perceived disjuncture between the angel's words of honorific greeting to her ("Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!", Luke 1:28) and her lowly social status. Why would the Most High call *her* "favored one" (κεχαριτωμένη), indicating with that strange perfect passive participle that she is already the recipient of the divine favor? "The Lord is with you" is an affirmation of reality, not a wish for future favor upon her.²⁷ This is the way the great heroes of old (great *men*) were addressed—and it is a startling form of greeting to a young, unmarried, status-poor girl from a backwater town in Galilee.²⁸ Mary's confusion comes from the perceived disconnect between this expression of divine grace and her own lowly status, as confirmed by her self-descriptions in the Magnificat. Looking ahead to the second panel of Luke's introduction, we see further evidence of Mary's lowly socio-economic status once she enters Joseph's household: they present two doves as the offering for Mary's purification (Luke 2:24), the sacrifice prescribed for those who cannot afford a lamb (Lev 12:6, 8).

Luke's narrative of the two sets of parents proceeds in a way that subverts the reader's expectations about who will be honored. Zechariah and Elizabeth, the righteous and high-status couple, are persons of honor, worthy of divine favor. In the first scene of panel one (Luke 1:5–25, the announcement of John's conception), everything seems to fit the stereotypical pattern. The worthy couple will be blessed with a child through miraculous, divine intervention; despite Zechariah's momentary unbelief, all will be well. The familiar Old Testament pattern will be repeated in a way that carries no surprises for the reader. Then, suddenly, Gabriel appears a second time and announces that God has bestowed an even greater favor on Mary, a young female without status

25 In fact, as Green says, "Mary's insignificance seems to be Luke's primary point in his introduction of her here." Joel B. Green, "The Social Status of Mary in Luke 1,5–2,52: A Plea for Methodological Integration," *Bib* 73 (1992): 457–72 [465].

26 The fact that Joseph is a Davidide communicates nothing about his socio-economic status.

27 For discussions of κεχαριτωμένη (and why the Vulgate's famous translation, *gratia plena*, "full of grace," is misleading), see Bovon, *Luke* 1:50; Edwards, *The Gospel*, 45; and I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 65.

28 On the implications of Mary being greeted in a manner used for the male heroes of the OT, see Marshall, *The Gospel*, 65.

or honor.²⁹ This second scene, with its overturning of expectations about the lineage and socio-economic status of the God-favored characters, once again alerts the reader that something new and unprecedented is taking place. The contrasts in lineage, social status, and implied economic stability between the two sets of parents prepare readers not only for Mary's song a few verses later, but also for the radical reversals that will characterize the message and ministry of Mary's son in Luke 5–24.

2.1.3 Third Element of Contrast: the Gender of the Recipients

Another element that contributes to the contrast between the two sets of parents is the gender of the one receiving the angelic announcement. Although biblical annunciations of miraculous births are typically given to the mother,³⁰ the angelic appearance to Zechariah is clearly part of the connection Luke is drawing between Zechariah and Elizabeth and the founding patriarch and matriarch of Israel. As in the case of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 15:1; 18:1–15), so also in the case of John's parents it is the father-to-be who receives the visit and the announcement from the divine messenger. The twist in the story, however, is that the faithful response to God's mighty work comes from the woman. It is Elizabeth, not Zechariah, who gives voice to the initial praise for the miracle, expressed in words that deeply personalize the effects of divine favor: "Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men" (Luke 1:25).³¹ So although Zechariah provides the Abraham-like figure in the majority of the scene, it is Elizabeth whose words evoke the echo of all the Old Testament women whose shameful barrenness was taken away by a direct intervention of Yahweh.³² The father-to-be, a man used to speaking, is silenced by his own disbelief, while the mother-to-be, whose very body communicates the reality of the miracle, has the final voice in the scene, articulating clearly the impact of God's gratefully received favor.³³

In the second half of the parallel annunciation scenes, the spotlight turns from the father of the promised child to the mother, from a respected male

29 A birth to a virgin is an even greater miracle than a birth to an old married woman. See Bock, *Luke* 1:108.

30 See, for example, the announcements to Hagar (Gen 16:7–13) and Hannah (1 Sam 1:17).

31 Coleridge notes that Elizabeth, unlike Zechariah, knows how to interpret the sign: "Elizabeth comes to the recognition that this is God's work. She interprets the sign aright; and that she is made to do so in language reminiscent of Old Testament women suggests that the ground of her interpretation of the present sign is a remembering of what God has done in the past." *The Birth*, 47.

32 See the words of Sarah (Gen 21:6) and Rachel (Gen 30:23).

33 See Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 30.

elder and priest to an unknown young girl. In this scene, the human father-to-be appears as no more than a name, while the mother-to-be takes center stage. Unlike Zechariah and Elizabeth, who are in one sense stock characters in the biblical tradition of birth announcements, Mary stands as a unique actor. Although the Old Testament tradition contains examples of birth announcements given to women by the divine messenger, there is no biblical precedent for such an announcement to such a woman—an unmarried virgin. Readers familiar with Old Testament patterns will sense the typical paradigm shifting as they follow Luke's story of parallel birth announcements; Mary's son, consistently portrayed as superior to Zechariah and Elizabeth's offspring, is being announced through God's choice of a person (low status, poor, female) who seems to be vastly inferior to the priestly couple.

2.1.4 Fourth Element of Contrast: the Location of the Announcements

In addition to the contrast produced by the gender, lineage, and socio-economic status of the recipients of the angelic messages, Luke also heightens readers' awareness of that contrast through the geographical location of the two annunciations. The angelic announcement to Zechariah takes place in the very center of Jewish identity—in Jerusalem, in the temple, in the Holy Place (Luke 1:8–11).³⁴ This is a place where one would expect to hear a miraculous word from God—which makes even more ironic Zechariah's apparent lack of such expectation and his subsequent incredulity. In contrast, the annunciation to Mary happens in a village so insignificant that Luke must situate it for the reader in a larger geographical context: “a city of Galilee” (Luke 1:26).³⁵ The incipient portrait of reversal continues to build as Luke adds location to the collection of elements that highlight the contrast between Zechariah and Elizabeth, on the one hand, and Mary and Joseph on the other. The greater miracle is announced outside the center of power, privilege, and prestige, further underlining that Luke's story presents a new paradigm for divine action.

2.1.5 Fifth Element of Contrast: the Responses to the Divine Visitation

All the contrasting elements identified thus far prepare the reader for the most notable point of contrast between the two annunciations: the initial

34 “Luke begins his narrative not only in a ‘hieratic’ language, but in an ancient and sacred enclosure, where tradition is respected, and where humans are most open to divine interventions.” Gerald F. Downing, “Theophilus’ First Reading of Luke-Acts,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 91–109 (100).

35 On Mary's experience as a resident of a place like Nazareth, see Gale A. Yee, “The Silenced Speak: Hannah, Mary, and Global Poverty,” *Feminist Theology* 21 (2012): 40–57 (50).

response of the recipients to the angel's message. The contrast at this point is so marked that Richard Vinson titles the two annunciations "Gospel Rejected" (the response of Zechariah) and "Gospel Accepted" (the response of Mary).³⁶ Zechariah, who is presented as both a religious "professional" and a genuinely devout person (Luke 1:5–6), is flabbergasted by the appearance of an angel in the holy place and even more so by the angel's announcement.³⁷ Luke portrays Zechariah as having a keen awareness of the parallels between his situation and that of Abraham, since Zechariah's words to Gabriel echo Abraham's to God: "For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years" (Luke 1:18; Gen 18:11). Despite that familiarity with the biblical narrative, Zechariah seems to have forgotten the rest of the Abraham story—how God's gracious gift overcame the obstacles of age and barrenness. His question, "How will I know that this is so" (Luke 1:18) is interpreted by Gabriel as unbelief, a direct contrast to the response of Abraham.

Mary, on the other hand, exhibits an Abraham-like faith in the God of the impossible.³⁸ She is the only character in Luke 1–2 who receives an angelic visit that does not begin with the words: "Do not fear."³⁹ The lack of this standard angelic imperative is another signal to the reader that something new and different is happening. Although Mary does indeed need reassurance (Luke 1:30), her response to Gabriel's announcement indicates that fear has not dulled her extraordinary faith. Unlike Zechariah, who has questioned the veracity and feasibility of the divine word, Mary is simply questioning the "how" of the announced birth, not whether God will accomplish what he promised. Mary's response of faith is perhaps emphasized by Luke's careful choice of vocabulary to describe her initial confusion; her state of being "much perplexed" (διαταράσσειν, Luke 1:29) is even more intense than Zechariah's confusion (ταράσσειν, Luke 1:12). Out of her greater distress, she is able to respond with the faith that was lacking to Zechariah. As Sharon Ringe puts it, "Mary's assent to this project is the step Zechariah could not take."⁴⁰ As will be seen, it is also the

36 Richard B. Vinson, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008), 28.

37 Perhaps my British friends would say that Zechariah was "gob smacked" by Gabriel's sudden appearance.

38 For a concise discussion of the Abraham-Mary parallels, see Joseph A. Grassi, *God Makes Me Laugh: A New Approach to Luke* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986), 19–20.

39 Interestingly enough, at the end of Luke's Gospel, it is again female characters for whom the angels dispense with the usual "do not fear" preamble (Luke 24:5). Despite the women's terror, the angels go straight to the point with their astonishing announcement of resurrection—perhaps anticipating a Mary-like response of faith that trumps fear?

40 Ringe, *Luke*, 32.

step that Luke is inviting his readers to take, in imitation of Mary, the model of Abrahamic faith in this new situation.⁴¹

Mary requests no sign, as had Zechariah, but Gabriel graciously gives her one—the sign of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Now in her sixth month, Elizabeth bears witness in her own body to the faithfulness of God to her, to Mary, and to Israel. One of Luke’s frequent flashes of irony may be at work in the scene where the two women meet, in that it is the wife of a man silenced by lack of faith who gives voice to joyous recognition of Mary’s faith (Luke 1:42–45). The differing responses of Mary and Zechariah to the angelic word intensify the contrast that Luke is building between the two sets of parents. The response of faith that Luke is highlighting through the annunciation scenes comes not from the stereotypical, expected source, but from two women, one of whom is from a humble context. Mary, both in her person and in her response of faith to God’s “upside-down and comic” new work,⁴² stands in the opening panel of Luke’s introduction as the first embodiment of the divine reversal that is taking place.

2.1.6 Sixth Element of Contrast: the Timing of the Songs of Response to God’s Work

The final element to consider in the contrasting portraits of the two sets of parents-to-be is the timing of Zechariah’s song and Mary’s song in response to God’s promised work. Luke’s portrait of Zechariah has not been wholly unsympathetic, and in his last appearance in the narrative, the old priest finally becomes an exemplar of faith and praise as he lifts his voice in the Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79). But even here, in Zechariah and Mary’s parallel canticles, there is an element of contrast that puts the emphasis on Mary and her son. Zechariah sings *after* the miracle has been accomplished and his punishment for unbelief has been lifted (Luke 1:64–67). Mary sings *before* there could have been any visible confirmation of the miraculous conception. Luke implies that Mary sets out to visit Elizabeth very soon after her encounter with Gabriel,⁴³ so whatever Mary has experienced in that mysterious “overshadowing” by the Holy Spirit, she is still in the early days of her pregnancy, when the changes taking place in her body are still imperceptible even to her. Mary might be forgiven for wondering if she has imagined the whole thing. And yet—she sings!

41 See Coleridge, *The Birth*, 40.

42 Grassi, *God Makes Me Laugh*, 16.

43 “Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her. *In those days* Mary set out and *went with haste* to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth” (Luke 1:38–40, emphasis added).

The Magnificat is both a song of gratitude for what God has already done—the miracle that is not yet visible in her body but is taken in faith as an accomplished reality—as well as proleptic praise for all that God will yet do through the child growing in her womb. Zechariah sings to celebrate a *fait accompli*, visible to all; Mary sings before the miracle is accessible to human sight.

2.2 *Summary, the Contrasts between the Two Annunciations*

For the purpose of this analysis, the six contrasting elements of Luke's parallel annunciation stories have been separated, each into its own category. But within Luke's narrative they are inextricably intertwined, functioning together to produce an integrated portrait of the two sets of parents. In this first scene of Panel 1 (Luke 1:5–45), Mary is the exemplary model of faithful response to God's new work.⁴⁴ Luke deliberately locates that response not in the expected realm of honorable, high-status priests, but rather in the context of an insignificant, low-status, village girl of limited means.⁴⁵ It is important to note that from the outset of his story, Luke makes clear that the poor and lowly (represented by Mary) are not merely objects of divine or human charity in God's kingdom but are being called into active, full participation as agents of the kingdom.⁴⁶

Thus, underlying this first scene in Luke's introductory unit is the perceptible sense of unexpectedness, both in this “new thing” that God is doing and in the identity of those who will respond faithfully to it. The message of newness and reversal is so strong that one wonders if the words of Isaiah about “new things” were in Luke's mind as he pondered God's work in Jesus and composed his story of the divine annunciations: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18–19a).

2.3 *Mary's Song (Luke 1:46–56)*

The second scene in the first panel of Luke's introduction is Mary's Song, the “Magnificat” (Luke 1:46–55). It is here, during pregnant Mary's visit to pregnant Elizabeth, that the parallel story lines of the first scene converge. The

44 “Wenn Maria im Verständnis de Lukas und seiner Leser und Leserinnen eine besondere Stellung einnimmt, dann ihres Glauben wegen.” Hans Klein, *Das Lukas Evangelium 1: Auflage dieser Auslegung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 113.

45 “The pattern of reversal of status and privilege that will become the hallmark of the good news Jesus brings is already set in the annunciation stories. Zechariah becomes powerless to continue his formal liturgical duties, while Mary becomes the first to participate knowingly and willingly in God's future that has been announced to her.” Ringe, *Luke*, 32.

46 See Kuhn, *The Kingdom*, 247.

Magnificat is the first of the three canticles that are woven into Luke's infancy stories.⁴⁷ Standing at the end of the first panel and bringing the action to a temporary halt,⁴⁸ the Magnificat draws into sharper relief the contrasts that were initiated in Luke's parallel portraits of Zechariah and Mary and provides the first human interpretation of the angelic announcements.⁴⁹

Mary's song has strong thematic parallels with both Hannah's song of praise (1 Sam 2:1–10)⁵⁰ and Moses' song after the Red Sea deliverance (Exodus 15:1–18),⁵¹ as well as with the entire genre and tradition of Israelite hymns of praise.⁵² The song divides into two strophes, both focusing on God's faithfulness, mercy, and might. Except for the verbs in the opening couplet ("my soul magnifies/my spirit rejoices"), all the main verbs in the song have God as the subject. These verbs describe God's character through his actions as the mighty deliverer of the powerless, the status-less, and the insignificant. This fact makes the song more a celebration of divine action than a call to human action, although Mary's words of praise are in themselves an illustration of a correct human

47 The Magnificat (1:46–55), the Benedictus (Zechariah's song of response to John's birth and the lifting of his muteness, 1:68–79), and the Nunc Dimittis (Simeon's brief song of praise upon holding Jesus in his arms, 2:29–32). Two other snatches of song can also be found in Luke 1–2: Elizabeth's brief exclamation of praise in 1:25, which actually precedes Mary's Magnificat, and the song of the angels in 2:14.

48 This "full stop" in the narrative "is a reminder that Luke is not interested merely in *events*—past, present, and future—but especially in their *meaning*. The purpose of this narratological 'time out,' then, is hermeneutical—that is, to ensure that we understand the significance of the angel's annunciation to Mary, her conception, and the blessing pronounced by her relative." Green, *The Gospel*, 98.

49 In Luke 1:25, Elizabeth proclaims the personal significance of Gabriel's first announcement, but Mary is first to exegete the announced events on a broader scale.

50 Elements of commonality between Mary's song and Hannah's: the singer rejoices in God (Luke 1:47; 1 Sam 2:1); the lowly are lifted up (Luke 1:52; 1 Sam 2:1; ὑψόω in both cases); the hungry are filled (Luke 1:53; 1 Sam 2:5); raising and exalting are set in contrast with bringing down and humbling (Luke 1:52; 1 Sam 2:6–8); and words are spoken against the proud/arrogant (Luke 1:51; 1 Sam 2:3).

51 Elements of commonality between Mary's song and Moses' song: both open with words of exaltation and praise (Luke 1:46, μεγαλύνει; Exo 15:2, ὑψόσω); the promise of Exodus 15:13 is celebrated in Luke 1:54–55; and there is mention of the Lord's mighty arm, extended in saving action (Luke 1:51; Exo 15:6). Bovon observes insightfully that the Exodus 15 hymn of praise is sung first by a "male choir," then repeated by the women under the direction of Miriam (another "Mary," Exo 15:20–21). He wonders whether this pattern is reflected in Luke's doubling of Mary's song with Zechariah's, with the female singer taking the lead. Bovon, *Luke* 1:57.

52 Vinson calls the Magnificat "a Handelian recitative whose libretto is drawn from all over the OT." *Luke*, 41.

response to God's faithfulness.⁵³ The focus is on God; the pattern of reversal that is being established is rooted in divine action.⁵⁴

In the first stanza (Luke 1:46b–50), Mary sings about herself as the individual object of divine favor. She describes herself in three ways that correspond to the portrait that Luke painted of her in the annunciation scene, in terms of her socio-economic status and her character. First, she calls herself a person characterized by “lowliness” (ταπεινωσις, 1:48), which conveys both humility of circumstances and humility of heart.⁵⁵ Second, she qualifies that lowliness as the condition of a slave of God (τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ, 1:48).⁵⁶ With the phrase “his slave,” Mary asserts that her identity and vocation are rooted in and defined by her relationship to God, rather than to her father or her future husband; this will also become the community-defining relationship in the rest of Luke-Acts.⁵⁷ Third, she classifies herself with those who fear God (τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν, 1:50) as a recipient of God's mercy. “Fear the Lord” is a common Old Testament description of the appropriate response of faith in God.⁵⁸ It is this self-understanding that allows Mary to make sense of why God would show favor to someone of her undeniably humble status. Mary's faith-filled assent to God's strange plan (1:38), which bypasses the powerful elite to accomplish his purposes through unlikely and unexpected means and agents, is what makes possible the blessing of which she sings. She clearly understands

53 See Green, *The Gospel*, 100, and David E. Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 99.

54 On interpretive balance with respect to the two extremes—the Magnificat as merely a celebration of divine action, on the one hand, or as essentially a call to human-initiated revolution, on the other—see the discussions in Bock, *Luke* 1:158; Bovon, *Luke* 1:63; and John Nolland, *Luke*, 3 vol. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993, 2000), 1:69–77. See also Edouard Hamel, “Le Magnificat et le Renversement des Situations,” *Greg* 60 (1979): 55–58, 76–77.

55 Spanish versions include: “la bajeza” (RV60) and “la humilde condición” (LBLA). It is interesting to note that in Spanish, “humilde” has retained a stronger sense of “poor” or “of low socio-economic standing” than its English cognate, which tends to connote first an attitude or character trait. Both nuances are present in the Greek word and should be taken into account in exegesis of the passages where it is used. This sense of “humility/humble” expressing both a character virtue and a condition is well addressed by José M. Palma, “Tapeinosis—virtud, tapeinosis—estado: Orígenes y la exégesis moderna,” in *Diakónia pisteos: al Reverendo Padre José Antonio de Aldama* (Granada: Facultad Teológica de Granada, 1969), 51–67.

56 The translation of δούλη as “servant” is too respectable, since the Greek word is “more derogatory, connoting total submission and belonging.” Edwards, *The Gospel*, 55.

57 See Green, “The Social Status of Mary,” 468.

58 E.g., Gen 20:11; Exo 20:20; Deut 10:12; Ps 22:23; Prov 1:7; 9:10.

that what God has done for her marks a new era, as indicated by the phrase “from now on” (1:48b).⁵⁹ And her song models the proper response to God’s revolutionary new act: jubilant praise and bold proclamation.

The second stanza of the Magnificat (Luke 1:51–55) parallels the first, but broadens the scope of God’s faithfulness, mercy, and power beyond Mary’s personal situation. Mary now sings prophetically about what God’s gracious action on her behalf means for Israel and for all generations.⁶⁰ The aorist form of the verbs (Luke 1:51–54) paints a picture of social reversal already begun, of divine action inaugurated in the child conceived in Mary’s womb, with implications for the present and the future.⁶¹ In this section, the beneficiaries of God’s favor who stand in parallel to Mary are the “lowly” (who are lifted up, 1:52), the “hungry” (who are filled, 1:53), and God’s servant Israel (who is helped, 1:54).⁶² This second strophe sets a clear contrast between these Mary-like objects of God’s favor and “the proud” (whom God scatters, 1:51), “the powerful” (whom God brings down, 1:52), and “the rich” (who are sent away empty, 1:53).⁶³ This first overt articulation is a pattern that will be seen throughout Luke’s Gospel: the proud, the powerful, and the rich will often be presented as opponents of God’s work in Jesus, and the values that shape pride, power, and wealth will be overturned by Mary’s Son.⁶⁴ It is not unusual for Luke to use the speech of characters in the narrative to express ideological and theological content,⁶⁵

59 The phrase ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν signals not only a new moment in salvation history but also a defining moment in Luke’s narrative. See Bock, *Luke* 1:151.

60 “The poem presents God’s choice of the lowly mother and God’s overturning of society as *one* act. It suggests an underlying qualitative unity between what appear to be separate events; for in both, God’s surprising concern for the lowly is manifest. Thus the mighty God’s regard for a humble woman becomes the sign of God’s eschatological act for the world.” Tannehill, *The Shape*, 45.

61 Klein comments on the implications of the ingressive aorists: “Die wunderhafte Umgestaltung der sozialen Verhältnisse, die in den Aoristen beschrieben wird, versteht Lukas kaum mehr im Sinne revolutionärer Handlungen in der Geschichte, sondern einerseits als für den Christen im geistlichen Sinne bereits erfolgt, andererseits als noch bis zur Wiederkunft ausstehend. Gott greift in diese Welt ein und verändert sie.” *Das Lukas Evangelium*, 114.

62 As Tannehill notes, the “coupling” of these terms in poetic parallelism (lowly/hungry, proud/powerful/rich) signals to the reader that “we should no longer hear these words separately but in their interaction with each other. Such couplings suggest other couplings, so that even where words are not strictly synonymous or antonymous, similarities and contrasts are brought out.” *The Shape*, 36.

63 Luke 1:53 is the first occurrence in the Third Gospel of any form of πλουτέω/πλούσιος.

64 E.g., Luke 6:20–26; 9:46–48; 11:37–54; 12:13–34; 14:7–14, 33; 15:1–2; 16:14–15, 19–31; 20:1–19; 21:1–4; 22:66–71; 23:1–25. See Green, *The Gospel*, 104.

65 E.g., Luke 4:16–27; 6:20–49; 11:37–52; Acts 2:14–36; 3:12–26; 7:1–53; 10:34–43. On Luke’s use of character speeches, see Kuhn, *The Kingdom*, 128–30, and Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

and here Mary speaks in song of a reversal that anticipates Jesus' programmatic descriptions of his own ministry (4:18–19) and of life in the kingdom of God (6:20–26).⁶⁶

2.4 *Summary: the Lukan "Hints" in the First Panel of the Introduction*

The first panel of the Lukan introduction (Luke 1:5–56), which encompasses the parallel annunciations of the miraculous conceptions of John and Jesus, provides the initial glimpse into the Third Gospel's perspective on wealth and possessions. This perspective, articulated through both the content and the shape of the first introductory panel, is built on the two intertwined themes of reversal (the nature of God's saving work) and right response to that work. Through the contrasting portraits of the two sets of parents, and through Mary's song, Luke shows that God's work of salvation invites the participation of unexpected persons from the powerless margins, who respond with radical faith and obedience.

3 **The Second Panel: Birth, Presentation, and Boyhood** (Luke 1:57–2:52)

Panel 2 of Luke's introduction (Luke 1:57–2:52) presents the parallel accounts of the birth, presentation, and boyhood of John the Baptist and Jesus, with each account containing a canticle of praise for God's faithfulness and saving work. Like the first panel of the introduction, the second panel is also special Lukan material and its parallel construction is also weighted in both length and content to emphasize Jesus' superiority.⁶⁷ The elements observed in Panel One continue to be present: the socio-economic and status contrast between the two families, and the theme of reversal associated with God's work in Jesus.

66 Barbara Reid claims that Mary is not singing of a simple reversal of roles, but of "God's justice as creating a circle in which all have an equal place at the table ... For this to happen, two simultaneous movements are needed: the empowerment of those formerly oppressed, and relinquishment on the part of those holding the power, privilege, and status." Reid, "Prophetic Voices of Elizabeth, Mary and Anna in Luke 1–2," in *New Perspective on the Nativity*, ed. Jeremy Corley (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 40. I am not sure Reid's point can be sustained solely from the Magnificat but the rest of Luke's Gospel presents ample support for her claim, as will be seen. For a more developed version of Reid's basic claim, see Amanda Miller's fine treatment of "leveling and inversion" in the Magnificat and the Nazareth sermon, in *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), 133–64.

67 John's side of the parallel accounts encompasses only 23 verses (Luke 1:57–80), while the corresponding account of Jesus' birth, presentation, and boyhood takes up 52 verses (the entirety of Luke 2).

3.1 *The Birth, Presentation, and Boyhood of John (Luke 1:57–80)*

In terms of the interpretive clues about Luke's perspective on wealth and possessions provided within the introductory unit, the narrative of John's birth, presentation, and boyhood extends the patterns observed in the first panel. The initial contrast set up between John's family and Jesus' family (Luke 1:5–56) continues to be highlighted in the parallel presentations in the second panel. Interwoven with that contrast is the continued reversal of expectations about how God works and with whom God works in this new phase of salvation history. Both elements can be seen clearly when the story of John's presentation and circumcision ceremony (1:59–66) is set alongside the narrative of Jesus' presentation in Luke 2.

John's birth and boyhood are each dealt with in one-sentence summaries (Luke 1:57, 80); the bulk of John's side of this parallel narrative is given to the scene of his circumcision and naming. It is here that the contrast between the two families is most marked. Just as the annunciation of John's birth took place on a public stage, so does his circumcision ceremony. Luke paints a picture of a full-blown party, with friends, relatives, and neighbors all piling into Zechariah and Elizabeth's house as active participants in the celebration.⁶⁸ In fulfillment of Gabriel's words ("you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth," 1:14), there is communal rejoicing in John's birth (1:58), as well as communal pondering about his possible destiny (1:66). This corporate celebration stands in stark contrast with the private scene of Jesus' presentation (2:22–38). Even though Jesus is presented in the temple, a very public setting, Luke casts the scene in an almost solitary light, as if it occurred in a bubble; the crowds of worshippers who were presumably milling about in the temple courts are not perceptible as either participants or eavesdroppers in the moment. Jesus is brought by his parents alone and attracts no attention from the temple crowd. He is noticed only by two representatives of human faithfulness, Simeon (2:25–35) and Anna (2:36–38). Yet despite the lack of jubilant communal celebration in Jesus' case, it is clear where Luke's intended emphasis falls. John, according to his father's song of praise in the midst of the party, is destined to be "the prophet of the Most High" who will go before the Lord to prepare his way (1:76). But according to Simeon's song of praise, apparently

68 "On the eighth day *they* came to circumcise the child, and *they* were going to name him Zechariah after his father," Luke 1:59, emphasis added. Wolter, *Luke* 1:101, argues that the public nature of the scene is essential to Luke's theme of reversal; the argument of the guests about the proper name for the baby provides the opportunity for Luke to show that "God's plan of salvation establishes itself in a way that surprises the people of the narrated world because it does not meet their expectations."

unheard except by the wondering parents, Jesus is salvation incarnate, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” and glory to God’s people Israel (2:30, 32). The significance and impact of Jesus’ life and work will eclipse John’s.

The celebration at Zechariah and Elizabeth’s house also serves to reiterate the socio-economic contrast between the two families. The priestly couple obviously has the means to throw a well-attended party, in a culture where hosts’ roles were demanding and taken very seriously.⁶⁹ Mary and Joseph, on the other hand, host no parties for Jesus’ presentation, and their minimum-requirement offering attests to their limited means. From the beginning of his story, Luke seems to take pains to associate Jesus with “the lowly” and with the irony of overturned expectations: it is not the “silver spoon” baby from a comfortable family who takes precedence, but the born-in-a-stable baby from a family of very limited means.

As he did in the first panel of his introduction, so also in the second panel Luke guides the reader toward a new set of expectations about how God is at work in the world through Jesus. The reader’s eye is being trained to see evidence of divine action in unlikely, lowly places and among persons without socio-economic status or honor. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that Luke is painting a portrait of reversal that is far subtler than a simple, substitutionary replacement of rich, high-status people with poor, low-status people. It is undeniable that both families in these opening episodes are chosen by God to play significant roles in salvation history and to serve as examples of faithful obedience. Neither Zechariah and Elizabeth’s socio-economic stability nor Mary and Joseph’s lack of it is a barrier to God’s selection of them for his purposes.

3.2 *The Birth, Presentation and Boyhood of Jesus (Luke 2:1–52)*

After the narrative of John’s birth, presentation, and boyhood, Luke presents the parallel account for Jesus, continuing to paint a portrait of Jesus’ intimate association with poverty and low social status. We see this emphasis in three specific elements in Luke 2: (1) the location of Jesus’ birth; (2) the identity of the recipients of the angelic birth announcement; and (3) the purification offering of two turtledoves. A further element, Simeon’s prophetic word about “falling and rising,” while not directly linked to Luke’s portrayal of Jesus’ socio-economic status, nevertheless contributes an important development to the overall theme of reversal of expectations in these introductory chapters of the Gospel.

69 Bovon, *Luke* 1:86, describes hospitality in first-century Palestine as a “holy duty.”

3.2.1 The Location of Jesus' Birth: "Laid in a manger" (Luke 2:7)

Luke, alone among the New Testament writers, provides the detail, later romanticized in religious art and Christmas card scenes, that the newborn Jesus was laid in a manger, because his family could find no adequate lodging due to the census-driven crowds in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1–7). Ancient tradition holds that this rude cradle was in a cave;⁷⁰ the text of Luke neither confirms nor negates that tradition, but the use of the word "manger" (φάτνη, feeding trough) certainly indicates that it was some kind of animal shelter rather than a lodging place normally used by humans. Whatever the exact site communicated by "inn,"⁷¹ the detail of the manger is another brush stroke on the Lukan canvas, adding to the portrait of the humble situation of Jesus' earthly family. Unlike his cousin John, Jesus was not born in a house surrounded by well-wishers, but in some sort of animal shelter, possibly because his family was "outranked" by others who had a higher claim to the available guest room or shelter.⁷²

3.2.2 The Identity of the Recipients of the Birth Announcement (Luke 2:8–20)

After Luke describes the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth, the very next characters he brings on the scene are Bethlehem shepherds. Luke gives no characterization of this new group, so the reader must operate out of a stock understanding of the category "shepherd." While this category probably does not necessarily indicate despicable characters, as some have argued, shepherds were certainly representative of lowly, non-elite members of society.⁷³ As the announcement of Jesus' conception was given to a lowly peasant girl, so now the angelic annunciation of his birth is offered, not to persons of high status and privilege, but to shepherds. There is probably intentional irony at work here. Luke has carefully set the story of Jesus' birth in the shadow of Roman power (Luke 2:1–2),⁷⁴ yet it is neither to governor nor to emperor that

70 See, for example, the anonymous *Ikos of the Nativity of the Lord*: "Bethlehem has opened Eden: Come, let us see! We have found joy hidden! Come, let us take possession of the paradise within the cave." *The Festal Menaion*, trans. Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (London: Faber, 1969), 278.

71 The word κατάλυμα indicates either a guest room in a private home, as in Luke 22:11, or a public caravanserai. For a public hostelry Luke uses πανδοχείον in 10:34. See the discussions of the terminology in Bock, *Luke* 1:208.

72 See Garland, *Luke*, 121.

73 See the discussion of shepherds in Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 232.

74 See Walter Brueggemann, "Luke 3:1–4," *Int* 30 (1976): 404–409 (406).

the astonishing news of a Savior is given,⁷⁵ but to representatives of the poor among Rome's conquered peoples.

Unlike Zechariah and Mary before them, the shepherds ask no questions of their angelic visitor and there is no belief or unbelief language in their story.⁷⁶ They simply act in faith: "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us" (Luke 2:15). They demonstrate belief in the divine word through actions that express their expectation of its fulfillment. Isaiah 1:2–3 provides a possible Old Testament background for Luke's manger scene: "Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: I reared up children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. *The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib;* but Israel does not know, my people do not understand" (emphasis added).⁷⁷ Against this backdrop, the shepherds' recognition of "their master's crib" in Luke 2 underlines their function as faithful responders to God's work in Jesus and perhaps serves as an ironic anticipation of the non-recognition of Jesus by Israel at large in the rest of Luke-Acts.

The pattern that Luke carefully established in the first panel of his introduction is repeated here: obedient faithful response generates joy and praise. Like Mary and Elizabeth, the shepherds experience joy as a result of their obedience: "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Luke 2:20). Luke is offering his readers a pattern of faithful discipleship, and thus far in the narrative all those who have responded with faith-filled obedience to the startling divine work and word have been persons from the margins: female (Elizabeth and Mary) or poor (Mary and the shepherds).⁷⁸

3.2.3 The Offering of Two Turtledoves (Luke 2:22–24)

After the visit of the shepherds and Jesus' circumcision on the eighth day (Luke 2:21), Joseph and Mary apparently remained in Bethlehem for the remaining days of Mary's purification period,⁷⁹ before journeying up to the

75 On the use of "savior" (σωτήρ) as an imperial term, resulting in overtones of irony and subversion here, see Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 66.

76 See Thomas E. Grafton, "Just as It Was Spoken: Annunciation Type-Scenes and Faithful Response in Luke's Birth Narrative," *Conversations with the Biblical World* 31 (2011): 143–61 [161].

77 For discussions of Isaiah 1:2–3 as the background to Luke 2:7, see Carroll, *Luke*, 67, and Garland, *Luke*, 122. For a rejection of any connection between the Isaiah text and Luke's manger, see Stein, *Luke*, 107.

78 Zechariah, the high-status male who fails the first test, receives a second chance and at that time responds with exemplary faith and obedience.

79 See Lev 12:1–8.

temple in Jerusalem to present Jesus and make Mary's purification offering. Although not a well-attended celebration like that thrown by John's parents for his naming and circumcision, the parallel nonetheless is weighted to give emphasis to Jesus. Rather than the eighth-day celebration of circumcision, Luke stretches the narrative of Jesus' parents' ritual piety across more than a month, encompassing his naming, circumcision, and formal presentation in the temple.

As we already saw, the detail in Luke 2:22 about Joseph and Mary's sacrifice of two turtledoves "according to what is stated in the law of the Lord" is a clear indication of the lowly economic situation of Jesus' parents. Leviticus prescribes the purification offering for a new mother, including a "poverty clause": "If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering" (Lev 12:8). Other than noting that Mary and Joseph have acted in careful obedience to the law, Luke offers no commentary on the implications of the couple's choice of a pair of birds as their offering, probably assuming that his readers are familiar with Scripture and thus aware of the terms of Leviticus. Such familiarity with the Old Testament background would solidify for the attentive reader the importance of Mary's self-identification with the poor and lowly in the Magnificat. It appears that Luke is deliberately situating Jesus and his family in a context of intimate identification with the poor and lowly.

3.2.4 "Falling and Rising" in Simeon's Song and Blessing (Luke 2:28–35)
In addition to the contrasts between the two families, another way that Luke extends and emphasizes Jesus' side of the parallel in Panel Two is by including the encounters between Jesus' family and Simeon and Anna in the temple courts (Luke 2:23–35). While this episode does not contribute directly to Luke's portrayal of Jesus' low socio-economic status, it does add emphasis to the themes of reversal and right response that Luke has been highlighting throughout the introduction. The encounter with Simeon also introduces a new element to those themes: a challenge to Jewish exclusivism. Both Simeon's brief song of praise (2:29–32) and his prophetic words to Mary (2:34–35) contain strong hints of how God's work in Jesus will impact the entire human race. Reversal may no longer be imagined in simplistic terms as the exaltation of the Jewish nation and the corresponding crushing of their Gentile overlords. Right response to God will mean right response to Jesus. This response, rather than ethnic identity, will be the determining factor in the fate of both Jews and Gentiles, leveling the playing field in a shocking new way.

Simeon sings praise for the salvation that his eyes have seen—Jesus.⁸⁰ This salvation is “prepared in the presence of all peoples” (Luke 2:31). Simeon’s plural, “all the *peoples*” (πάντων τῶν λαῶν) extends the reach of the good news beyond the Israel-centered praise songs of Mary and Zechariah and beyond the “great joy for all the *people*” of the angel’s announcement to the shepherds (2:10).⁸¹ If there were any doubts about the scope of “all the peoples,” the parallel phrases “to the Gentiles” and “to your people Israel” in the next verse clarify that God is doing something through Jesus that will have universal ramifications, encompassing both Israel and the nations.

Simeon’s words highlight once again the theme of right response: true Israel will be known through its response of faith to Jesus. In clear anticipation of the opposition and conflict that will surround Jesus’ mission in Israel throughout Luke’s Gospel, Simeon tells Mary that her child is destined for the “rising and falling” (πῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν) of many in Israel and that he is a “sign that will be opposed” (σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον).⁸² Although the vocabulary is different, Simeon’s phrase “rising and falling” (Luke 2:34) echoes the idea of “lifting up and bringing down” in Mary’s song (1:52). The parallelism of Simeon’s two phrases (rising and falling/sign of opposition) implies that one’s response to the sign—Jesus—will determine whether one rises or falls, with the warning that many people will oppose the sign and fall.⁸³ The hints about that opposition that have been given thus far in the Third Gospel point to the distinct possibility that it will come from the rich, the proud, the powerful; those hints will be born out in the rest of Luke-Acts, as the power structures of Judaism resist the work of God in Jesus.⁸⁴

Simeon himself provides another model (along with Mary, Elizabeth, and the shepherds) of right response to the surprising work of God. Luke says nothing about Simeon’s age, vocation, or social status, choosing to focus exclusively on a description of his character (δίκαιος, righteous) and his religious piety (εὐλαβής, devout). He is a righteous person who has been patiently waiting on God to act and whose faith is not derailed when the Lord responds in an

80 “My eyes *have* seen.” Jesus’ significance is presented as an accomplished, *present* reality in Simeon’s song, in contrast to the prophetic words sung over John, which point to his *future* role. Green, *Luke*, 139.

81 The singular “all the people” in 2:10 probably refers to all of Israel.

82 Σημεῖον is connected with the Gentiles in Isa 11:10, 12; 49:22; 62:10. Tannehill comments: “If this is the source of the reference to Jesus as ‘sign’ in Luke 2:34, a major cause of opposition will be the inclusion of the Gentiles in Jesus’ messianic kingdom.” Tannehill, *Luke*, 73.

83 “Rising and falling” and “sign of opposition” are both prepositional phrases (εἰς + accusative) governed by the verb κείται.

84 See Karl A. Kuhn, *The Kingdom according to Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 233.

unexpected way. Simeon's hope had been focused on anticipation of "the consolation of Israel" (παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, Luke 2:25), an Isaianic phrase for the eschatological deliverance of the God's people.⁸⁵ When it is revealed to him that Israel's consolation is also good news for non-Jews, Simeon's faith and hope do not waver.⁸⁶ Along with Anna (2:36–38), Simeon represents those who will "rise" in Israel because of a right response to Jesus.

3.3 *Summary: the Lukan "Hints" in the Second Panel of the Introduction*

We have seen a clear pattern in the second panel of Luke's introduction (the birth, presentation, and boyhood narratives, Luke 1:57–2:52). Luke continues to develop the theme of the reversal of expectations as God's saving work unfolds. This pattern of reversal is vital to the Lukan portrayal of Jesus and his kingdom mission in the rest of Luke-Acts.⁸⁷ Luke also continues to emphasize right response to God's work of salvation in Jesus. The faithful responders in the second panel are once again drawn from the margins; Mary, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna all represent "the lowly," who have been invited to participate in God's new work and who respond with radical faith and obedience. Each of their responses in turn contributes to the developing Lukan affirmation that "the proper response to the divine message is to believe that God's words will come to pass in actual human events."⁸⁸ This pattern of faithful response, carefully developed in the introduction, stretches across the entirety of Luke-Acts.

4 The Third Panel of the Introduction: the Mission of John and Jesus (Luke 3:1–4:44)

Luke 3:1–4:44 provides the third panel of John-Jesus parallels and completes Luke's introductory unit. It is in this third panel that both the structure and the message of the Lukan introduction find their completion and full expression. The diptych structure created by the first two panels (Luke 1–2) is balanced by the third panel of the introduction (Luke 3–4).⁸⁹ The themes of reversal and

85 E.g., Isa 40:1–2; 49:13; 51:12; 66:13.

86 See Bock, *Luke* 1:238.

87 See Philip L. Shuler, "The Rhetorical Character of Luke 1–2," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 173–89 [173].

88 Grafton, "Just as It Was Spoken," 144.

89 See Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 157.

right response to God's work in Jesus become even clearer in the third panel, and the economic aspects of both themes are even more sharply drawn.

The third panel sets in parallel the adult John and the adult Jesus, with accounts of the beginning of their respective public ministries. Each ministry account is anchored in a passage from Isaiah, each centers on a sermon that makes a direct reference to the use of wealth and possessions, and each includes examples of response to the message.

4.1 *John's Mission (Luke 3:1–20)*

As in the first two panels, John's side of the parallel is presented first. The account of John's mission (Luke 3:1–20) is the first Lukan pericope with parallels in the other Synoptics.⁹⁰ It consists of three elements: preparation of the reader for John's ministry, anchored in a text from Isaiah (Luke 3:1–6), John's preaching (Luke 3:7–17), and a response of opposition to John's message (Luke 3:18–20). In each of the three elements there is visible Lukan shaping, compositional markers that contribute to the motifs of reversal and right response that the Evangelist has been developing throughout his introduction to the Gospel.

4.1.1 Preparation for John's Ministry (Luke 3:1–6), Anchored in Isaiah 40:3–5

Luke prepares the reader for John's ministry by indicating its temporal setting (Luke 3:1–2) and by anchoring it in a passage from Isaiah (Luke 3:3–6; Isa 40:3–5). Matthew's generalized temporal introduction to John's mission, "in those days" (Matt 3:1),⁹¹ is expanded by Luke into a detailed listing of the cadre of political and religious leaders who hold power when John comes on the scene.⁹² I believe that this socio-political positioning of John's ministry accomplishes two things. In the first place, it creates resonances with the similarly situated call and commissioning of Old Testament prophets,⁹³ an echo that is immediately strengthened by Luke's use of the typical prophetic phrase "the word of God came to John" (Luke 3:2).⁹⁴ This literary setting prompts readers familiar with the Old Testament to expect the sudden appearance of a prophet, signaling impending divine activity. Second, this listing of "the powers that be"

90 Matt 3:1–12 / Mark 1:2–8.

91 Mark has no temporal markers to introduce John's ministry.

92 For a detailed discussion of the historicity and dating issues surrounding this list, see Fitzmyer, *The Gospel* 1:455–59.

93 E.g., Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1–3; Amos 1:1.

94 Matthew and Mark do not include this prophetic language to describe the opening of John's ministry; they describe it simply as "preaching" (Matt 3:1/Mark 1:4).

situates John within the context of human authority, in both its Roman and Jewish forms. Given Luke's previous use of irony when situating Jesus' birth in a similar way (Luke 2:1–2), the reader is led to anticipate here another reversal of expectation about power, status, and honor.⁹⁵ With what Edwards aptly calls “acid irony,” Luke makes clear that although “the word of God” comes in the midst of power and prestige, it does not come to the powerful and prestigious people in the socioeconomic center, but to a title-less man in the wilderness.⁹⁶

It is in this social, political, and religious context that Luke presents John's itinerant preaching ministry, interpreting it through the lens of Isaiah 40:3–5. Like Matthew, Luke makes use of Isaiah 40:3 (“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’”),⁹⁷ but then he expands the citation to include Isaiah 40:4–5 (“Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”).⁹⁸ The passage Luke cites stands at the opening of the large unit Isaiah 40–66, with its message of moral purification and holiness for the people of God,⁹⁹ which makes it an especially appropriate background for John's preaching. In addition, with this expanded quotation from Isaiah, Luke once again foregrounds the motif of reversal, picking up on echoes from the songs in the birth narratives. Isaiah's language about high places being made low (ταπεινωθήσεται) echoes the bringing down of the powerful and the lifting up of the lowly (ταπεινούς) in the Magnificat (Luke 1:52), and “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” reminds the reader of the inclusion of “all the peoples” in Simeon's song (2:31). John stands squarely within the current of reversal that Luke has been carefully introducing.

4.1.2 John's Preaching (Luke 3:7–17)

After the introduction of the adult John anchored in Isaiah and shaded with irony by the historical-political context, Luke identifies the explicit recipients of John's prophetic warnings as “the crowds,” rather than the narrower

95 As Green says, “Having read the preceding narrative, we now have a bias against rulers who enter the narrative.” Green, *The Gospel*, 168.

96 Edwards, *Luke*, 106.

97 In their citation of Isa 40:3, both Luke and Matthew follow the LXX exactly, with the exception that the Evangelists close the verse with τὰς τριβύλους αὐτοῦ instead of with τὰς τριβύλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, which gives a christological impact to the citation, since John the Baptist is clearly preparing the way for *Jesus*. See Wolter, *Luke* 1, 68.

98 Luke's quotation of Isa 40:4–5 follows the LXX closely, but makes the following two changes: (a) In Luke 3:5d, the Evangelist has αἱ τραχεῖαι εἰς ὁδοὺς λείας, while the LXX of Isa 40:4 reads ἡ τραχεῖα εἰς πεδίαι; (b) Luke omits Isa 40:5a, καὶ ὁφθήσεται ἡ δόξα κυρίου. On the latter omission, see Nolland, *Luke* 1:144.

99 See Bock, *Luke* 1:291.

audience of “Pharisees and Sadducees” indicated by Matthew (Matt 3:7). Luke shows much more interest in John the preacher than in John the baptizer; in fact, Luke alone among the Evangelists supplies specific content for John’s preaching. That content is summed up in the over-arching imperative: “Bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). Repentance is necessary because of the upheaval (reversal) that is taking place: “the ax is lying at the root of the trees” to cut down and throw into the fire every tree that does not bear good fruit (3:9). “Jewishness” alone will not be sufficient; repentance and its ethical outworking are required as part of a right response to the work of God in their midst.

Luke is the only evangelist to record the crowd’s response to this warning, expressed in the triple repetition of the question, “What shall we do?” (Luke 3:10–14). This same question, which reappears at various key moments in the larger Lukan narrative, is always linked to the need for personal, concrete response to the message.¹⁰⁰ The question is asked here by characters who will play key roles in Luke’s Gospel narrative—the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers, with the latter two groups existing on the fringes of acceptability in Jewish society.¹⁰¹ John’s answer to each group illustrates concretely what it means to “bear fruit worthy of repentance” (3:8), and each illustration has to do with the use of material possessions and the correct attitude towards them. The three imperatives are related to radical generosity, communality, justice, and contentment, all illustrated concretely at the level of day-to-day decisions that fulfill the Old Testament command to love one’s neighbor: share coats and food with those who have none (3:11); don’t line your pockets by collecting more than is just (3:12); don’t extort money through threats and aggression, and be satisfied with your wages (3:14).¹⁰² These

100 See Luke 10:25; 18:18; Acts 2:37; 16:30; 22:10. Justo González notes correctly that John’s message typifies the “kingdom preaching” in Luke-Acts, combining as an integral whole the eschatological (divine) action and the resulting present imperative. In terms of the economic impact of that message, “it relates to both the justice that the Kingdom requires and the need for drastic action in view of its impending reality.” González, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 75.

101 When the soldiers prefix “what shall we do?” with καὶ ἡμεῖς (“we also; even we”), they may be indicating a fear of being excluded from this new thing God is doing, an anxiety produced by their awareness of living on the margins of acceptability. See Bovon, *Luke*, 93; and Marshall, *The Gospel*, 143.

102 “John the Baptist commands all his followers to share with those in need, and calls those who serve as retainers to abandon the socioeconomic strategies and dispositions of their elite masters.” Kuhn, *The Kingdom*, 237. Looking ahead from Luke 3 to the beginning of Acts, Klein comments, “The Christian life as a life in community is already mapped out here.” *Das Lukasevangelium*, 165 (my translation).

commands are costly, especially for tax collectors and soldiers, who are likely hard-pressed to make a living wage without resorting to the kinds of exploitative strategies against which John rails. As the rest of Luke's narrative will show, the ethical conduct that John calls for stands in full harmony with both the scriptural call to love one's neighbor and the ethics of Jesus and his community.

4.1.3 A Response of Opposition to the Message (Luke 3:18–20)

John's message generates expectations in the crowds, who receive it as good news (Luke 3:15–18). But the elite response that Luke highlights is hostile, to the point of costing John his freedom. John's message to Herod the tetrarch was a rebuke, not just for the latter's immoral relationship with his brother's wife, but "because of all the evil things that Herod had done" (3:19).¹⁰³ Luke does not specify the evils, but within the narrative context (3:1–20), the reader certainly expects that "all the evil things" credited to Herod must include some kind of social or economic injustice.¹⁰⁴

In the third introductory panel, Luke uses John's portion of the parallel ministry accounts to highlight important elements in his developing portrait of reversal and right response. After setting John's ministry in an ironic context of reversal of status expectations, the Evangelist gives a summary of the Baptist's preaching that focuses on the just and generous use of material possessions as the essential evidence of "fruits worthy of repentance." Those who respond positively to the message are the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers—groups who will also consistently respond positively to Jesus in the Gospel—while the negative response of opposition comes from Herod, who foreshadows the common reaction of the powerful elite in Luke-Acts.

4.2 *Jesus' Mission (Luke 3:21–4:44)*

The first half of the third panel of Luke's introduction focuses on John's mission; the parallel second half presents the mission of Jesus. Following the pattern observed in the first two panels, the parallel is weighted to give priority to Jesus. In fact, Luke effectively sweeps John off the stage at 3:20; the account of John's arrest even before Jesus' baptism and the elimination of any mention of John within the brief dominical baptism scene function to narrow the focus clearly

103 Matthew and Mark include only John's specific rebuke concerning Herodias and they give that information in the context of John's death, not in their introduction to his ministry (Mat 14:3–4/ Mark 6:17–18).

104 See Green, *The Gospel*, 183.

and deliberately on Jesus.¹⁰⁵ The narrative of Jesus' incipient ministry follows the basic pattern of John's side of the parallel, with three central elements: the preparation for Jesus' mission, anchored in a text from Isaiah (Luke 4:16–21), Jesus' preaching (4:22–27), and responses to the message (4:28–30). But, in keeping with Luke's established pattern of including additional content in the Jesus side of the parallel, he inserts two substantial elements not present in the presentation of John's mission. These two elements frame the account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. First, there is an extended preamble, comprised of Jesus' baptism, genealogy, and temptation (3:21–4:15). Second, after the central section that forms the parallel with John's side of the panel, there is a series of episodes that illustrate Jesus' mission and provide the bridge between the Lukan introduction and the rest of the Gospel narrative.

4.2.1 The Preamble: Baptism, Genealogy and Temptation (Luke 3:21–4:15)

The preamble is a sequence of three pericopae—Jesus' baptism, genealogy, and temptation—functioning as a unit to emphasize two aspects of Jesus' identity before he begins his mission. First, he is the Son of God and, second, he is filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' divine sonship is attested by the voice from heaven (Luke 3:22), by the narrator in the genealogy (3:38), and by the devil in the temptation (4:3, 9).¹⁰⁶ Jesus' filling, empowering, and guidance by the Holy Spirit are emphasized in the baptism scene (3:22), the temptation narrative (4:1),¹⁰⁷ and the summary statement (4:14) that links the preamble to Luke's presentation of Jesus' mission. While the specific themes being tracked in the analysis of the Lukan introduction are not explicitly present in the triad of pericopae in this preamble (i.e., there is no explicit mention of wealth and possessions, reversal and right response), it is important to note that when these themes resurface—almost immediately!—they do so in a context heavily stamped with the divine imprimatur and with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰⁵ Richard J. Erickson observes that, from a literary standpoint, Luke does the same thing as Herod—he shuts John up in prison! “The Jailing of John and the Baptism of Jesus: Luke 3:19–21.” *JETS* 36 (1993): 455–66 [455].

¹⁰⁶ The devil's words “if you are the Son of God” are *Εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ*, a form that does not so much question the *reality* of Jesus' sonship as challenge him to prove what kind of Son he will be. Perhaps an English translation that captures this nuance would be “since you are the Son of God.”

¹⁰⁷ Unlike Matthew and Mark, who write that Jesus was led (thrust, in Mark's case) *into* (εἰς) the wilderness, Luke has the imperfect (ἤγετο, was led/was being led) *in* (ἐν) the wilderness, a construction that emphasizes the persistent presence of the Spirit with Jesus throughout the temptation.

4.2.2 Preparation for Jesus' Mission (Luke 4:16–21), Anchored in Isaiah 61:1–2; 58:6

As he did with John the Baptist, Luke situates his portrait of Jesus' mission within the context of an extended quote from Isaiah. Luke places the words of the prophet on the lips of Jesus during a visit to the synagogue in Nazareth,¹⁰⁸ and he highlights the significance of the Isaiah reading by the triple repetition of “the scroll” (τὸ βιβλίον) in an almost staccato chiasm that frames the quotation:

A “*the scroll* of the prophet Isaiah *was given to him*” (4:17a)

B “he *unrolled the scroll*” (4:17b)

C “he found the place where it was written” (4:17c) + the OT quotation (4:18–19)

B¹ “he *rolled up the scroll*” (4:20)

A¹ “[he] *gave it back*” (4:20)¹⁰⁹

While the agent of the passive “was given to him” can be inferred as “the attendant” (ὁ ὑπηρέτης, 4:20), its anonymous use in Luke 4:17 may shade toward a divine passive, emphasizing the participation of God in the selection of this reading. This divine intentionality is further underscored by the main verb: “*he [Jesus] found* the place where it was written” (4:17). The Spirit-filled Son of God deliberately selects this particular text,¹¹⁰ a passage intimately linked with Jubilee imagery of salvation, liberation, and economic “fresh start.”¹¹¹ Just as deliberately, he “adjusts” the reading to communicate his intended message,¹¹² leaving out a clause in Isaiah 61:1, inserting a clause from Isaiah 58:6

108 Matthew and Mark mention the Nazareth version later in their chronology of Jesus' ministry, rather than at the outset (Mat 13:53–58/Mark 6:1–6a), and neither gives the content of Jesus' preaching in his hometown.

109 On the chiasm, see Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 57; also Edwards, *Luke*, 154.

110 “It seems likely that Jesus chose the Isa 61 reading here since the prophetic reading probably was not fixed in the New Testament era and since εὑρεν appears to picture that Jesus deliberately chose the text rather than that he read from an assigned reading or from a chance opening.” Charles A. Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 102.

111 Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 69.

112 It is quite possible that the “adjustment” here is Luke's, but it is awkward to speak continually of “the Lukan Jesus” or Jesus (Luke). For simplicity's sake, I will use “Jesus” to name the dominical speaker in the Gospel, recognizing behind that term both the reality of Lukan editorial shaping of narrative and dialogue, as well as the conviction that Luke's choices accurately reflect dominical words and deeds.

(probably because of the shared word ἄφ᾽εσις),¹¹³ and omitting the second direct object clause in Isaiah 61:2 (allowing the reading to end on what will prove to be a key word in Jesus' exposition of the text, δεκτόν).

After the reading, there is a dramatic pause, as Jesus performs a series of actions (rerolls scroll, returns it, sits) that seem to unfold in slow motion in the midst of a pregnant silence, with all eyes upon him (Luke 4:20). The moment of narrative tension is broken by his abrupt announcement: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). Given the traditional association of hearing ears with openness to a prophetic word,¹¹⁴ this curt declaration of Jesus is designed to demand a response. "Today" (σήμερον) is in the emphatic first position, indicating the significance of the moment. Now, before their eyes and in their hearing, the prophetic word has become reality in the person and presence of Jesus, someone they thought they knew (4:22).

This startling announcement provokes questions in the reader: How is Isaiah's message fulfilled in Jesus? Also, how does Jesus' understanding of his mission, expressed in the language of Isaiah, shape how readers are to interpret the themes of reversal and right response that Luke has been weaving into his introduction and that are an integral thread in the fabric of the rest of his Gospel and Acts? A close analysis of the quotation's structure will provide clues to its message and programmatic function.¹¹⁵

The quotation of Isaiah 61:1–2 begins with an over-arching claim: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," an assertion fully in line with what Luke has just established about Jesus in the preamble to this scene. Because of the emphasis on Jesus being filled with the Spirit prior to this moment in Nazareth, Luke's readers are not surprised when Jesus appropriates this text to himself, no matter what the reaction of the listeners within the narrative. This claim ("the Spirit of the Lord is upon me") is then illustrated in two parallel purpose clauses:

113 "In the first century it was not uncommon to pull two or more passages out of their original literary contexts and read them together. This was done by word tallying; that is, both passages would have had in them at least one word that was the same. Here it was the Greek word *aphesis*." James A. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts*, Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 14–25 [21]. See also Patrick D. Miller, "Luke 4:16–21," *Int* 29 (1975): 417–21 (419).

114 See, for example, Deut 29:4; Isa 6:9–10; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2–3.

115 It has become axiomatic to refer to the entire Nazareth pericope as "programmatic" for the Lukan portrait of Jesus' ministry. Despite the overuse of the term, it probably remains the most adequate for describing the impact of this text on the interpretation of the rest of Luke-Acts.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me (Luke 4:18a; Isa 61:1a)

because (οὗ ἐνέκεν, Luke 4:18b; Isa 61:1b)

He anointed me

He sent me¹¹⁶

(Luke 4:18b; Isa 61:1b)

(Luke 4:18d; Isa 61:1c)

Purpose:

Purpose:

to **proclaim good news**¹¹⁷ to the poor¹¹⁸

to **proclaim**¹¹⁹ release to the captives and sight to the blind

(Luke 4:18d; Isa 61:1c)

(Luke 4:18d–e; Isa 61:1e)

to **send** the oppressed into release

(Luke 4:18f; Isa 58:6)

to **proclaim**¹²⁰ the acceptable year of the Lord¹²¹

(Luke 4:19; Isa 61:2a)

As Robert Alter has shown, the kind of poetic parallelism present in Luke's use of the composite Isaiah text functions to set the central focus on the first element, with the second half of the parallel serving to intensify and clarify the meaning and scope of the first.¹²² In this case, the focus is on the phrase: "He anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor." The triad of actions in the second half of the parallel provides a restatement of that initial declaration.¹²³ The "good news" is clarified as involving "release" (ἄφεσις), "sight" and "the acceptable year of the Lord." The beneficiaries of the mission, identified in the

¹¹⁶ "Proclaim good news" is the definitive, over-arching purpose that encompasses the others, since it is governed by "he anointed me" and the other three by "he sent me." For a different perspective, see Nolland, *Luke* 1:192, 196.

¹¹⁷ Εὐαγγελισασθαι. Tannehill notes Luke's frequent use of this verb to characterize Jesus' preaching: 4:43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1. Tannehill, *Luke*, 91.

¹¹⁸ Here Luke omits ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμμένους τῇ καρδίᾳ. Nolland, *Luke* 1:197, suggests that the phrase is omitted to avoid the excessively metaphorical interpretation of "the poor" that might occur if the phrase were set in parallel to "the broken-hearted."

¹¹⁹ Κηρύξαι.

¹²⁰ Luke replaces the LXX καλέσαι with κηρύξαι, probably to form an inclusio with the first occurrence of this verb in v. 18.

¹²¹ Here Luke omits the parallel direct object phrase found in the LXX: καὶ ἡμέραν ἀναποδόσεως.

¹²² "The conscious or intuitive art of poetic parallelism was to advance the poetic argument in seeming to repeat it—intensifying, specifying, complementing, qualifying, contrasting, expanding the semantic material of each initial verset in its apparent repetition." Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 122.

¹²³ For reading these terms as a single classification (what he calls a set of types), see Roth, *The Blind, The Lame, and the Poor*, 26.

first half of the parallel under the general category “the poor,” are particularized as “the captives, the blind, the oppressed.” To state it another way, proclaiming release to captives, sight to the blind, and liberty for the oppressed all fall under the larger umbrella of “proclaiming good news to the poor.”¹²⁴ The term “poor” (πτωχοί), therefore, seems to function here to name a category that earlier in Luke’s introduction has been characterized as “the lowly” (ταπεινοί). As Luke 1–3 linked God’s new work of salvation with the ταπεινοί, now Jesus links his role in that divine work with the πτωχοί. The divine actions undertaken on their behalf result in a reversal of their circumstances: poverty becomes well-being, captivity is exchanged for freedom, blindness is replaced by sight, and oppression becomes release.¹²⁵

Luke has clearly chosen this Isaiah text (or more accurately, this melding of texts from Isaiah) to describe Jesus’ vocation. He describes Jesus’ role in God’s unfolding work in a way that echoes Mary’s song and John’s preaching, and indicates that his mission will have a direct impact on “the poor.” From its location in Luke 4:18–19, the Isaiah text looks back across the length of the Lukan introduction, pulling to the forefront the Holy Spirit’s role in Jesus’ life and mission (Luke 1:35; 2:27; 3:22; 4:1, 14) and highlighting the picture Luke has been assembling of good news to the ταπεινοί/πτωχοί. To this point in Luke’s narrative, all those who have responded appropriately to God’s work are members of that over-arching category (Mary, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna). It will be seen that the quotation also looks forward, providing the shape and interpretive lens for the rest of Jesus’ ministry, beginning immediately in the series

¹²⁴ David P. Seccombe argues persuasively that the umbrella term πτωχός and all the sub-categorizations of it (both here and throughout Luke’s Gospel) must be understood in terms of its Isaianic background. However, his perception of three distinct and non-overlapping portraits of the poor in Isaiah is less persuasive. Seccombe sees each major division of the Book of Isaiah presenting a separate use of “poor”: “the peasants of the pre-exilic period being squeezed off their lands by the rich and powerful, the captives of the exile, and the dispirited nation of the restoration.” Because Luke’s citation comes from the third section of Isaiah, Seccombe argues that the programmatic use of πτωχοί in Luke 4:18 must refer exclusively to “the nation Israel suffering and in great need.” David P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: Fuchs, 1983), 39. See also Richard A. Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 67–68, and Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 182–91. I believe these perspectives do not adequately account for Luke’s use of πτωχοί, either here or throughout the rest of the Gospel.

¹²⁵ Consistent with his overall thesis, Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor*, 57, sees captivity, blindness, and oppression as “three alternative descriptions of a single reality: Israel’s Captivity.”

of programmatic illustrations (4:31–44) that complete the Lukan introduction and carrying on into the remainder of the Gospel.¹²⁶

4.2.3 Jesus' Preaching, an Exposition of the Isaiah Text (Luke 4:22–27)

After Jesus' appropriation of the Isaiah text to himself, the initial response of his fellow Nazarenes is positive: "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth" (Luke 4:22).¹²⁷ So, it is surprising when Jesus seems determined to provoke their hostility, first by putting in their mouths skeptical questions and demands and then by sharply identifying himself with the prophets of old rejected by their ancestors (4:23–24).¹²⁸ He appears to be anticipating how they will respond when he finishes reinterpreting Isaiah's message for them.¹²⁹ Within first-century Judaism, "good news to the poor" was understood to mean "good news to Israel," in a narrowly exclusivist sense.¹³⁰ Jesus, however, offers his hearers an alternative understanding of "the poor,"¹³¹ illustrating his exposition of the text with two examples from the ministries of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha: the "good news" of healing and divine provision offered to a Sidonian widow (1 Kings 17) and a Syrian leper (2 Kings 5). Both these recipients of divine favor were doubly "poor" from the perspective of Israel: They were Gentiles and they were low-status persons inhabiting the margins of society (women, widows, lepers). The poor (captive, blind, oppressed) who will find release and good news through Jesus' ministry are a group that transcends the firmly fixed ethno-religious boundaries of the first-century Jewish worldview. "By directing his good news to these people,

¹²⁶ On the forward-backward reach of the Nazareth episode within the Gospel, Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation*, 76, says, "Looking backward, the incident provides commentary and explanation for Jesus' receipt of the Spirit at his baptism along with further clarification of what it means to be God's Son ... Looking forward, the passage anticipates the rejection of Jesus and his message."

¹²⁷ "Amazement," while often a favorable response in Luke, is seldom the equivalent of being convinced or converted. See, e.g., Luke 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; Acts 2:7, 12; 4:13; 8:13.

¹²⁸ The contention here by Jesus that he (and the prophets before him) are not "acceptable" (δεκτός) to Israel links his provocative exposition directly to the text that he just read. "As was the common Jewish practice of the day, Jesus joins comments in his exposition (here in the form of a dialogue) to his original Scripture text by a catchword." Kimball, *Jesus' Exposition*, 114.

¹²⁹ This is the first of many times that Luke will show Jesus' awareness of the inner thoughts of his human interlocutors. E.g. Luke 5:21–22; 6:7–8; 7:39–40; 9:47. It is also the first indication in Luke that Jesus is now *the* authoritative interpreter of Israel's Scriptures.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Sanders' discussion of the exclusivist interpretation of Isaiah 61 by the Essenes. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," 62. See also Mallen, *The Reading and Transformation*, 76.

¹³¹ Thus, though Seccombe's equation (poor = captive Israel) may accurately represent 2TJ's perspective, it stands in contrast with the new paradigm Jesus is offering.

Jesus indicates his refusal to recognize those socially determined boundaries, asserting instead that even these 'outsiders' are the objects of divine grace."¹³² This is a reversal of expectations in line with the promise of salvation "prepared in the presence of all peoples" (Luke 2:30–31) and seen by "all flesh" (3:6). In this new work of God, of which Jesus sees himself as the Spirit-filled agent, the beneficiaries of good news will not be found exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, within the confines of Judaism.¹³³

It is this dominical homily, brief but packing a theological punch, that explains why Jesus cut off the text in the middle of Isaiah 61:2. There are two intertwined reasons for why the reading ended at the key word "acceptable," leaving out the words of both vengeance and comfort that follow in Isaiah. First, Jesus was turning upside down his contemporaries' general interpretation of the beneficiaries (i.e., that the comfort was for Israel and the vengeance for Israel's enemies).¹³⁴ Second, by ending the reading on the word δεκτός (acceptable), he was also overturning the typical Jewish interpretation of what was meant by a year acceptable to God. As Sanders says, "A Jewish interpretation understood this as a year acceptable to Israel! That indeed would be based on a hermeneutic of grace emphasizing God as Israel's own redeemer God only."¹³⁵ But Jesus, at the very outset of his public ministry and using their own cherished scriptures, offers the people a radically different hermeneutic that challenges their entire set of expectations about how the world works, and how God works. It is this dominical interpretation that provides the program for both Jesus' own mission (Luke) and the mission of the church (Acts).

4.2.4 A Response of Opposition (Luke 4:28–30)

An immediate and violent response of opposition to Jesus' message provides within the narrative the first actualization of Simeon's prophecy about Jesus' effect on Israel (Luke 2:34). Those hearers who just moments earlier had been filled with admiration for this hometown teacher are now filled with homicidal rage. They are deeply offended, not by the fact that Jesus is claiming to fulfill prophecy, but by his claim that "God is not Jewish" and that his grace is being extended, through Jesus, beyond the borders of Israel.¹³⁶ As Sanders says, Jesus'

¹³² Green, *The Gospel*, 211.

¹³³ See Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 191.

¹³⁴ On this stunning reversal of national expectations, see Paul Hertig, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in Luke: Reversals of Fortune," *Missiology: An International Review* 26 (1998): 167–79 (168–69).

¹³⁵ Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," 23.

¹³⁶ See Justo L. González, "A Latino Perspective," in *Methods for Luke*, ed. Joel B. Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 113–43 (129).

interpretation of Isaiah 61:1–2 “disengages any thought that God’s agenda must follow Israel’s.”¹³⁷ Like John, Jesus makes a clear declaration that being Jewish is not enough; there must be a right response to God’s saving work, by Jew and Gentile alike. The rejection of this stunning reversal of Jewish expectations at the outset of Jesus’ ministry foreshadows the continued rejection of Jesus (Luke) and of his message and messengers (Acts).¹³⁸

4.2.5 An Illustration of the Message and Mission (Luke 4:31–44)

Luke closes Jesus’ side of the third panel with a series of three vignettes that has no parallel on John’s side. This triad of stories illustrates the Spirit-empowered mission of the Son of God, described by Jesus himself in Isaiah’s language as good news to the poor and reversal of circumstances for the captives, the blind, and the oppressed.¹³⁹ The three healing and preaching stories (Luke 4:31–44) work with the triad of narratives in the preamble (3:21–4:15) to frame Luke’s programmatic portrait of Jesus’ mission, with both reflecting the same emphasis on Jesus’ identity as the Spirit-filled Son of God. This final series of anecdotes also serves as the bridge from the Lukan introduction (1:5–4:44) into the rest of the Gospel narrative.¹⁴⁰

The three anecdotes—the healing of a demon-possessed man in a Capernaum synagogue (Luke 4:31–37), the healings at Simon’s house (4:38–41), and Jesus’ reiteration of his mission (4:42–44)—provide glimpses into how Jesus’ mission will be worked out.¹⁴¹ Luke gives no specifics regarding the content of Jesus’ preaching in Capernaum, but given the context, the reader

¹³⁷ Sanders, “Isaiah in Luke,” 24. Tannehill notes that Jesus’ role as “hometown boy” would have strengthened his hearers’ expectation of preferential loyalty and exacerbated their rage at his unexpected, inclusive interpretation of God’s grace. Tannehill, *Luke*, 93.

¹³⁸ See Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition*, 115.

¹³⁹ The Capernaum vignettes “show the liberating mission of Jesus,” concretizing with paradigmatic cases “the reaches of the jubilee announcement by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth.” Darío López Rodríguez, *The Liberating Mission of Jesus: The Message of the Gospel of Luke*, trans. Stephanie E. Israel and Richard E. Waldrup (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 251.

¹⁴⁰ Ó Fearghail notes that chronology is not Luke’s motivation for telling this triad of stories; rather, he is interested in providing literary and theological closure to his introduction. Luke 4:14–44 functions to ensure that “the parallel with John’s ministry is completed, that John’s relationship with Jesus is clarified, and that a programmatic introduction to the ministry of Jesus is provided.” Fearghus Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction to Luke-Acts: A Study of the Role of Lk 1,1–4,44 in the Composition of Luke’s Two-Volume Work* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 28.

¹⁴¹ “Unlike the Baptist, Jesus brings the Kingdom of God near through his work. The promise of Isaiah 61:1, which announces Jesus’ actions, is fulfilled.” Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 202 (my translation).

can assume it is similar to his message in Nazareth.¹⁴² The proclamation of good news to the poor and of release to the captives, blind, and oppressed will consist not only of words but also of powerful deeds: demon-controlled persons are set free (Luke 4:35, 41); sickness-oppressed persons are released into health (4:39, 40); good news is proclaimed in all of Palestine (4:43–44). In other words, where the Spirit-empowered Son of God is present, reversal happens.

4.3 *Summary: the Lukan "Hints" in the Third Panel of the Introduction*

The third panel of Luke's introduction (Luke 3:1–4:44) balances and completes the parallels between John and Jesus established in the diptych formed by the first two panels. The superiority of Jesus over John, so carefully elaborated in Luke 1 and 2 is intensified by their presentation as adults in mission (Luke 3–4). In both length and content, the Jesus side of this third parallel points clearly to "the one who is greater than I" about whom John preached (3:16).

The third panel also serves to strengthen the hermeneutical clues provided in the first two panels about the themes of reversal and right response and their relationship to the motif of wealth and possessions. In the infancy narratives, Luke carefully sets Jesus in an intimate relationship with the poor and the lowly, through the circumstances of his human family and through those humble persons who respond in faith to announcements of his coming. In the third panel, Jesus boldly characterizes the thrust of his mission as "good news to the poor," a category of persons that includes but is not limited to the economically deprived. In Luke 1–2 the Evangelist uses the motif of reversal (of expectations, of circumstances) to describe the saving work of God; in chapters three and four he uses cherished texts of reversal from the prophet Isaiah to characterize the ministries of both John and Jesus. John's call to repentance, with its concrete, socioeconomic applications, indicates that God's work of salvation will overturn expected ways of "doing business," and Jesus' bold declaration of mission beyond Israel indicates that the accepted ways of categorizing insiders and outsiders are also being reversed. And in the first two panels of the Gospel's introduction, Luke emphasizes over and over again that appropriate responses of faith in God's new work are coming from the poor, the lowly and the marginalized, with the elite and powerful standing in the place of either ignorance or opposition. In the third panel, that pattern continues. John is opposed by Herod, a representative of civil power; Jesus is opposed by those who occupy the religious center, who represent the power of a traditional, exclusivist mindset.

142 What Luke does say about Jesus' preaching is that it had recognizable and astonishing "authority" (ἐξουσία, Luke 4:31).

5 How Luke's Introduction Prepares the Reader for His Gospel

Chapter 1 of this project established a strong case for setting Luke 1:5–4:44 as the proper delimitation of the introduction to the Gospel. As Ó Fearghail notes, this introductory unit provides significant hermeneutical insight. “Since the main lines of the portrait of Jesus both with respect to his person and his mission are already drawn in 1,5–4,44, the reader or hearer at this point has knowledge that the characters of the narrative proper do not have.”¹⁴³ So, what “insider knowledge” do readers have about Luke’s perspective on wealth and possessions after a careful study of his introduction? What are the hermeneutical clues that Luke has dropped for the reader to follow? What expectations has he created that will guide the interpretive trek through the body of the Gospel?

First, for Luke, *the motif of wealth and possessions is intimately connected to the theme of reversal* (the nature of God’s saving work). Two very clear statements about “the rich” and “the poor” have been given at key moments in the Lukan introduction. First, in the Magnificat, the song of praise by the first faithful responder in the Gospel, we learn that one sign of God’s new work is that “he has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:53b). The flip side of this reversal is heard on the lips of Jesus near the end of the introduction, in his programmatic mission statement: “He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (4:18). Between those key bookends of bi-polar reversal,¹⁴⁴ Luke includes in his introduction two other hints of bi-directional overturning of present circumstances: Simeon’s words about “falling and rising” (2:34) and the image of valleys filled and mountains brought low in the Isaianic introduction to John’s ministry (3:5). Luke sees a kind of upheaval happening as the salvation of God is realized,¹⁴⁵ and at least part of that disturbance of the status quo has to do with economic issues (wealth, possessions). As we move from the introduction into the rest of the Gospel, then, we have been alerted to watch for how Luke portrays the mission of Jesus bringing about this kind of reversal and what that will mean for the wealthy and their possessions.

143 Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction*, 150.

144 “Bi-polar reversal” is York’s term for reversals that are bi-directional—the groups at both ends of a spectrum (in this case, the poverty-wealth spectrum) find themselves in reversed circumstances. York, *The Last Shall Be First*, 32–38.

145 López Rodríguez chooses “liberation” as the most adequate term for categorizing this upheaval or reversal. *The Liberating Mission*, 2.

Second, for Luke, *the motif of wealth and possessions is also closely linked to the theme of right response* (the nature of discipleship).¹⁴⁶ Throughout the introductory chapters, Luke has drawn a subtle but persistent picture of faithful responders, one hundred percent of whom are representatives of “the poor” (πτωχοί) and “the lowly” (ταπεινοί). Mary, Elizabeth, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers—these are the ones who respond positively and with faith to the announcement of God’s new thing (Luke 1–2) and to the call for repentance (Luke 3). All of them are either economically poor or status-poor (or both). The elite, wealthy, and powerful characters in Luke’s introduction represent responses of incredulity (Zechariah, initially), ironic ignorance (all the named Roman powerbrokers in 2:1 and 3:1), or outright hostility (Herod). This fact alerts the reader, as we move from the introduction into the body of the Gospel narrative, to pay careful attention to how this pattern will continue—the poor and lowly representing faithful response to the gospel, the rich and powerful representing hostile or incredulous response to Jesus and his message. Luke has, in a sense, prepared the reader to be suspicious of wealthy, powerful characters that he will introduce as the rest of his two-volume narrative unfolds. The reader enters the Lukan narrative with an incipient expectation that abundance of possessions will somehow be an obstacle to faithful discipleship.

Having established the hermeneutical clues that Luke provides in his introductory unit about his perspective, we move forward with this interpretive lens in place: the motif of wealth and possessions is intimately connected to the themes of reversal and right response to God’s work in Jesus. Reversal—including the inversion of economic values and practices that oppress the poor—is what God accomplishes; right response—which in the introduction comes from poor and humble characters—is the human welcoming of the divine work. Through this interpretive lens we will analyze the rest of the material in Luke’s Gospel and Acts that deals both directly and indirectly with wealth and possessions, particularly in relation to the twin themes of reversal and right response.

¹⁴⁶ I agree with Allen Verhey that discipleship in Luke is presented as an ethic of response to the apocalyptic action of God in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. “Luke knows, and his audience confesses, that one has indeed been raised from the dead, the very one who preached good news to the poor ... and repentance takes the shape of welcoming the reversal he announced in his words, anticipated in his deeds, and established in his cross and resurrection.” *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 90.

Reading Luke 5–24 through the Lens of the Introduction (Part 1)

In Chapter 1, we saw that the parameters of Luke's programmatic introduction encompass the entirety of Luke 1–4. This introduction can be considered a cohesive unit that sets the theological and literary stage for discerning Luke's approach to his special interests, including the motif of wealth and possessions. Chapter 2 demonstrated how Luke's introduction establishes close links between the motif of wealth and possessions and the intertwined themes of reversal and right response. The way is now prepared for a detailed narrative analysis of Luke's perspective on wealth and possessions in the rest of the Third Gospel, informed by the expectations and interpretive cues provided in the introduction.

The analysis of Luke 5–24 in this chapter will progress in two stages, organized around the presence of two elements in the text: the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. This chapter examines the Lukan texts that contain both elements: the themes of reversal and right response with an *explicit* link to the motif of wealth and possessions.¹ Chapter 4 surveys Lukan passages that contain the themes of reversal and right response with indirect or *implicit* links to wealth and possessions.

1 Explicit Links between Reversal and Right Response and the Motif of Wealth and Possessions (Luke 5–24)

There are thirteen pericopae in Luke that demonstrate an explicit intersection between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions.² This link is found across a wide variety of forms that includes dominical sermons and sayings, parables, and narrated encounters

1 Each text will be analyzed specifically in terms of how it relates to this investigation; obviously many significant exegetical points will be left untouched, because they are outside the scope of this project. For details on other exegetical aspects of interest to the reader, see the commentaries listed in the bibliography.

2 Luke 5:1–11; 5:27–32; 6:20–26; 7:18–23; *8:1–3; *12:13–21; 14:7–24; 14:25–33; *16:1–13; *16:14–31; 18:18–30; *19:1–10; 21:1–4. Starred passages are unique to Luke.

between Jesus and other characters. These texts are scattered across all the major sections of the Gospel: the Galilean ministry (Luke 5:1–9:50), the “travel narrative” (9:51–19:27), and the Passion narrative (19:28–23:56). The thirteen texts will be considered in narrative sequence,³ beginning with the call of the first disciples, the opening pericope in the body of the Gospel.

1.1 *The Call of the First Disciples, Luke 5:1–11 (Matt 4:18–22/Mark 1:16–20)*

As we saw in Chapter 2, the call of the disciples in Luke 5:1–11 provides a definitive shift in the narrative. Jesus now invites others into the ministry and mission described in the introduction. In the midst of a literally pressing encounter with the crowd (Luke 5:1), Jesus sees some boats and their owners (5:2). He not only commandeers one of their boats (5:3), but he also engages the fishermen, first at their current level of understanding (boats, nets, fishing, 5:4) and then with a vision of immediate new possibilities (catching human lives, 5:10).⁴ The men demonstrate the elements of a right response to the presence and call of Jesus.⁵ First, they show awareness of and obedience to Jesus’ authority, even when his imperative goes against everything they think they know (5:5–6). In this, they replicate Mary’s response to God in the introduction (1:38) and model right response to Jesus as it will be seen in the rest of Luke-Acts. Second, they recognize their sin and unworthiness (5:8).⁶ Third, they demonstrate a radical shift in loyalty and priorities defined by Luke as *leaving* and *following* (5:11). Although Luke records only Simon Peter’s address of Jesus as “Lord” and his confession of sin, his colleagues take the final radical step with him, so it can be assumed that they too have passed through the stages of recognition, self-awareness, and shifting of loyalties.

3 As S. John Roth notes, reading sequentially builds a cumulative understanding for the reader, who continually balances the memory of previous episodes with the resulting expectations for subsequent episodes. Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 64. Tannehill calls this “narrative resonance,” connections that build cumulatively, providing background “for exploring those nodal points of narrative where many connection lines cross.” *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2 vol. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1986, 1990), 2:76.

4 The phrase ἀπὸ τοῦ νῆος introduces a note of immediacy. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2 vol. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981, 1983), 1:568.

5 As Joel Green notes, “The initial purpose of this episode is to secure for Luke’s audience the nature of appropriate response.” *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 230.

6 Garland discerns a pattern in Luke-Acts: “Those who know themselves to be sinners are the most responsive to Jesus, while those who regard themselves as religiously virtuous and look down their noses on sinners regard him with antagonism.” David E. Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 228.

This initial episode in the body of the Gospel clearly links the theme of right response (discipleship) with the motif of wealth and possessions. In the wake of the marvelous catch, the fishermen “left everything and followed him” (5:11).⁷ The “everything” that they left was substantial—not just the profits from the catch of a lifetime, but the boats and nets that were their source of ongoing income,⁸ and, presumably, their culturally-established family obligations. As will be seen, the *leaving* and *following* that characterize discipleship in the Gospel involve a departure from material sources of provision, security, and status, for the sake of loyalty to Jesus.

1.2 *The Call of Levi, Luke 5:27–32 (Matt 9:9–13/Mark 2:13–17)*

The call of Simon and his associates is followed immediately in Luke’s narrative by two healing stories.⁹ The second of these stories is particularly significant for two reasons. First, it gives the initial hint of the incipient hostility toward Jesus by the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Second, there is a broadening of the promised “release” (ῥῥεσις, Luke 4:18) to include not only physical liberation (i.e., healing) but also forgiveness of sins (5:20–24). It is immediately on the heels of this second healing that Jesus encounters Levi.

The calling of Levi is both similar to and different from the previous call story. Unlike the case of Simon Peter, there is no indication from the narrator that Levi had previously encountered Jesus, so the dominical imperative—“Follow me!” (Luke 5:27)—is abrupt. Levi’s response is immediate and parallels that of the fishermen: “leaving everything he got up and followed him” (5:28). Early on in his Gospel, Luke makes clear that a right response to Jesus is the same for all believers—whether disciples-cum-apostles or “ordinary” followers¹⁰—and it includes radical renunciation, summarized in the phrase “left everything.” But then Luke slips in a detail that muddies the waters of this portrait of discipleship: Levi hosts a party for Jesus at his home (5:29).¹¹ Even after “leaving

7 Luke’s “everything” is emphatic and all-encompassing in comparison to Matthew’s “they left the boat and their father” (Matt 4:22) and Mark’s “they left their nets” (Mark 1:18).

8 See Rick Carlson, “Who Then Is the Faithful, Insightful Steward? Consumerism and Luke’s Stewarding Vision,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 49 (2010): 275–83 (277), and Christopher M. Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics: A Study in Their Coherence and Character* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 82.

9 The cleansing of a leper (Luke 5:12–16) and the healing of a paralytic (5:17–26).

10 Luke does not associate this Levi with Matthew; he is not treated as one of the Twelve (see 6:13–18). See the discussion in Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 590.

11 Banquet/meal scenes play a significant role in Luke’s portrait of Jesus: 7:36–50; 11:37–54; 14:1–24; 19:1–10; 22:7–38; 24:13–35.

everything,” Levi still has the material resources for lavish hospitality to a large number of guests (5:29). This is the first glimpse into the nuances of Luke’s portrait of what right response looks like in terms of wealth and possessions. It includes both a *leaving* and a *using* of material wealth. Both the fishermen and Levi have left lucrative sources of income and, according to Jesus’ subsequent warning (9:57–62), seem to face the very real possibility of straitened circumstances when their surplus runs out. Levi here uses some of that surplus to share table fellowship with both Jesus and those who are normally excluded. This combination of “leaving” and “using” will be seen again in Luke’s summary of discipleship (8:1–3) and will be illustrated by the response of various followers throughout the narrative.

Levi’s friends—whom Luke calls “tax collectors and others” (5:29) but whom the disapproving Pharisees characterize as “tax collectors and *sinners*” (5:30)¹²—respond to Jesus’ call with celebration. The Pharisees and scribes react with grumbling disapprobation.¹³ They question the disciples about their reason for eating with such people; implicit is concern for maintaining appropriate boundaries between groups of people.¹⁴ Jesus answers them directly, and, like them, he divides people into two groups—the healthy/righteous and the sick/sinners. Unlike the Pharisees, however, he makes it clear that it is the latter group that he has come to confront, for the express purpose of calling them into a repentance that will lead to a reversal of their current condition. As Darío López puts it, their right response to Jesus converts their social reality “from marginality to comradeship.”¹⁵ The sick will be healed, the repentant sinners will become righteous, as the two healing stories have already shown (5:12–26).

The two call stories in Luke 5 establish the fundamental links between right response to Jesus and a right use of wealth and possessions. Both stories emphasize the shift of loyalty from material goods as security providers to Jesus as the source of confidence.¹⁶ This faith is expressed most consistently by a radical *leaving* behind of material security (5:11, 28) but also by the

12 On the exclusionary nature of this categorization by the Pharisees, see Green, *The Gospel*, 247–48.

13 They were *murmuring* (ἐγόγγυζον). See Luke’s use of διεγόγγυζον at 15:2 and 19:7 for other “grumbling” about Jesus’ choice of table companions.

14 See the Pharisees’ concern for clear and appropriate boundaries in Luke 7:36–50; 14:1–24; 15:1; 18:9–14.

15 Darío López Rodríguez, *The Liberating Mission of Jesus: The Message of the Gospel of Luke*, trans. Stephanie E. Israel and Richard E. Waldrup (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 44.

16 This point will be characterized explicitly as a choice between two masters (Luke 16:13).

proper *using* of possessions to serve Jesus and his “focus group”—the poor and excluded (5:29, 30).

1.3 *Beatitudes and Woes, Luke 6:20–26 (Matt 5:3–12)*

Following these call narratives, the next pericope that makes an explicit link between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions is the Lukan version of the beatitudes, paired with the uniquely Lukan woes.¹⁷ With its strong, deliberate echoes of both the Nazareth sermon and the Magnificat, this key text stands at the head of the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20–49) and is directed primarily to disciples, those who have already responded appropriately to Jesus (6:20a).¹⁸ Luke 5 made clear that for these disciples, leaving and following are the formative actions of their new life; now Luke 6 gives special attention to the character of that life. There is no evidence of a change of addressees at the interstice between the blessings and the woes; both are directed to the same group: Jesus’ disciples.¹⁹

Luke pairs his beatitudes and woes in striking parallelism:

A: (v. 20) **Blessed** (μακάριοι) are you who are poor (οἱ πτωχοί), *for* yours is the kingdom of God.

B: (v. 21a) **Blessed** are you who are hungry (οἱ πεινῶντες) **now, for** you will be filled.

C: (v. 21b) **Blessed** are you who weep (οἱ κλαίοντες) **now, for** you will laugh.

D: (v. 22) **Blessed** are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

E: (v. 23a) **Rejoice** (χάρητε) in that day and **leap** (σκιρτήσατε) for joy, *for surely* (ἰδοὺ γάρ) your reward is great in heaven

F: (v. 23 b) **For that is what** (κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ γάρ) their ancestors did to the prophets.

17 Some of the material in this section was previously published in “The Lukan Beatitudes (Luke 6:20–26) in the Canonical Choir: A ‘Test Case’ for John Christopher Thomas’ Hermeneutical Proposal,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 26 (2017): 48–67.

18 Though both Luke (6:17–19) and Matthew (5:1–2) mention the crowds that (over)hear the sermon, the primary addressees are the disciples (Luke 6:20; Matt 5:2, where “them” refers most logically to the disciples, the antecedent noun in closest proximity to the pronoun).

19 See Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 573. Contra Betz, see Hans Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium 1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 246–49.

A¹: (v. 24) **But woe** (πλὴν οὐαὶ) to you who are rich (τοῖς πλουσίοις), **for** you have received your consolation.

B¹: (v. 25a) **Woe** to you who are full (οἱ ἐμπλεησμένοι) **now, for** you will be hungry.

C¹: (v. 25b) **Woe** to you who are laughing (οἱ γελῶντες) **now, for** you will mourn and weep.

D¹: (v. 26a) **Woe** to you when all speak well of you,

F¹: (v. 26b) **For that is what** (κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ γὰρ) their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Six observations on this structure offer interpretive clues. First, both the poor and the rich are addressed personally as “you” (ὤμεῖς, i.e., disciples). This first dominical address to wealthy persons in the Gospel assumes the presence of both poor and rich disciples of Jesus in the community for which Luke was writing.

Second, the initial beatitude and woe pair (“blessed are you poor,” 6:20; “woe to you rich,” 6:24) provides the over-arching interpretive categories for the subsequent pairs.²⁰ Being poor includes the present experiences of hungering, weeping, and being hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed on account of the Son of Man;²¹ being rich includes the present experiences of full bellies, laughter, and being spoken well of by others.

Third, while the governing beatitude and woe pair speaks of a present condition and a present consequence, the supporting pairs express a present condition, emphasized by νῦν, linked to a future reversal of that reality. This intermingling of present reality and future expectation holds both promise and implicit demand for the disciples of Jesus; there is an inescapable ethical component to a right response to Jesus, which is hinted at here and will be developed as Luke’s narrative progresses.²²

Fourth, it is significant that the only element in the passage without a structural parallel is the promise of reversal in 6:23a:²³ “Rejoice in that day and

20 See John York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 58, and Hans Kvalbein, “Jesus and the Poor: Two Texts and a Tentative Conclusion,” *Themelios* 12 (1986–87): 80–87 (83).

21 The triad poor-hungry-weeping is found in the OT, especially in the prophets, as a special object of Yahweh’s compassion and, therefore, the compassionate response of his people. See especially Isa 58:6–11.

22 “As principles of eschatological and divine justice[,] the Beatitudes are ipso facto future-oriented; as principles pronounced in the present[,] they have an impact on the present as well.” Betz, *The Sermon*, 96–97.

23 “In passages where there is extensive parallelism, the units that are without parallel are the ones in focus.” David J. Clark, “The Sermon on the Plain: Structure and Theme,” *BT* 47 (1996): 428–34 (429).

leap for joy, for behold, your reward will be great in heaven.”²⁴ This central element—the promised overturning of the present suffering of “you poor”—is consistent with the reversal theme that is present in Luke’s introduction.

Fifth, both parts of the passage—blessings and woes—close with a strong link between the lives of the addressees (disciples) and the experience of the ancient prophets (6:23b).²⁵ The current sufferings of “the poor” correspond to the rejection of the ancient prophets, while the current laughter and popularity of “the rich” correspond to the facile embrace of the false prophets of old. Implicit is the ancient pattern of reversal: something rejected by Israel is affirmed by God or something accepted by Israel is rejected by God. This pattern provides a model for the coming reversal.

Finally, this key passage sets the categories “poor” and “rich” in an antithetical relationship to one another.²⁶ This Lukan pattern was hinted at in the Magnificat and will be emphasized repeatedly throughout the rest of the Gospel.²⁷

Since “poor” and “rich” have been identified as the key interpretive categories in Luke’s beatitudes and woes, it is important to examine the essential significance of this pair of terms in Luke’s thinking. There are three basic perspectives regarding Luke’s use of poor/rich vocabulary. First, poor and rich may be understood as referring exclusively to literal socio-economic categories.²⁸ Second, poor and rich are sometimes seen as soteriological categories that reflect the orientation of the person toward Jesus and the kingdom and may or may not reflect actual economic conditions.²⁹ Third, poor and rich are understood as social categories of exclusion and inclusion, shame and

24 My translation.

25 Or the false prophets, in the case of the rich (6:26b).

26 See René Krüger, “Conversion of the Pocketbook: The Economic Project of Luke’s Gospel,” in *God’s Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America*, Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 169–201 (177).

27 Luke 12:13–34; 14:7–24; 16:19–31; 18:18–25.

28 See, for example, Richard Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke’s Gospel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 22–23.

29 See, for example, Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, 2 vol. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994, 1996), 1:574–75; I. H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989): 120–23; Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (Linz: Fuchs, 1982), especially 39f; and John J. Navone, *Themes of St. Luke* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1970), 108. For persuasive arguments against the “pious poor” reading, see Green, *The Gospel*, 210; Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 204–205; and L. John Topel, *Children of a Compassionate God: A Theological Exegesis of Luke 6:20–49* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 69, n. 46.

honor.³⁰ It will be seen as the analysis of the Gospel progresses that all three of these perspectives are interwoven in Luke's use of "poor." When speaking *descriptively* of disciples (as in the beatitudes), Luke uses "poor" as a metaphor for those who have responded appropriately to Jesus (i.e., they have left and followed). Thus, in certain instances, "poor" is a soteriological category. However, when Luke speaks *prescriptively* to the disciples about their responsibilities, his use of "poor" is firmly rooted in the category of literal, socio-economic poverty.³¹ Almsgiving and radical generosity are to be the bridge between Jesus' disciples and these "poor." However, this literal use of "poor" extends beyond a merely socio-economic categorization to include the entire range of persons excluded from participation and power in society. To illustrate, there are seven lists in the Third Gospel of who should be included in the new community that is forming around Jesus, beginning in the programmatic Nazareth sermon (4:18). All seven include the poor,³² six times with "poor" at the head of the list as an over-arching category.³³ In Luke 7:22, "the poor" is in the final position in the list, playing an emphatic summative role. Other categories in these Lukan lists are: the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, the hungry, the weeping, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the crippled, and the beggars—groups of persons "ordinarily defined above all by their dishonorable status, their exclusion."³⁴ In Luke, "the poor" is always a personal term (poor *persons*, rather than the impersonal condition, "poverty"),³⁵ and is a categorization that reflects not just the person's economic privation but the experience of humiliation and social alienation that results from it.³⁶

In contrast to this multivalent use of "poor," Luke demonstrates a strikingly monovalent use of "rich." Although paired with "the proud" and contrasted with "the humble" in the Magnificat (Luke 1:47–53), which could be taken as a primarily attitudinal descriptor, "rich" has a consistent socio-economic resonance. Topel's keen observation about the use of πλούσιος in the LXX is also an apt description of how Luke uses the word: "Whether the attitude to the rich is

30 E.g., Green, *The Gospel*, especially 210–12, 264–67; also Dieter H. Reinstorf, "The Rich, the Poor, and the Law," *HTS* 60 (2004): 329–48 (332–33).

31 For more on this distinction between "poor" as descriptive of disciples and "poor" as the prescribed target group for disciples' ministry, see the intriguing comments in Hans Kvalbein, "Jesus and the Poor," 86.

32 Luke 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22.

33 See Green, *The Gospel*, 267.

34 Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 82.

35 See Krüger, "Conversion," 177.

36 English is hard-pressed to capture this polyvalence of πτωχός; *les misérables* (French) or *los miserables* (Spanish), come closer. See the pertinent discussion in Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (LaVonne Neff, translator; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984), 142–47.

approving or condemnatory, the word always refers to the economically rich; there is no LXX usage of πλούσιος meaning ‘spiritually wealthy,’ nor does the adjective refer to God’s enemies without reference to economic status.”³⁷ In the Gospel, whether disciples (Luke 6:24–26), would-be disciples (18:18–30), or Jesus’ opponents (14:12–14) are in view, “the rich” are always understood to be those with economic means (and the accompanying social status, privilege, and power), and are addressed by Jesus with either harsh criticism or firm imperatives.³⁸

In this understanding of the categories of poor and rich, “you poor” describes the disciples, while “preaching good news to the poor” or “blessing” the poor (the prescribed activities of the disciples) means overturning previous measures of status and inclusion. This concurs with what was already observed in the study of Luke’s introduction and will be amply illustrated in the rest of the Gospel through Jesus’ fearless, compassionate practice of table fellowship and personal engagement with people otherwise excluded from the mainstream of social and religious interaction. This perspective on Luke’s use of poor/rich language sharpens considerably the impact of the woes (6:24–26), since these declarations are also directed to disciples, those who claim to have placed their loyalty and their resources fully with Jesus and his mission. The implicit warning in Jesus’ words seems to be for those who would seek to follow him without “leaving all” (5:11, 28). The woes are not, as Klein points out, God’s “last word” to wealthy disciples, but rather God’s last appeal. “To the one who heeds them, the woes no longer apply, only the beatitudes.”³⁹

The Lukan beatitudes and woes are anchored in the themes of right response (they are directed towards disciples) and the eschatological reversal of present experience. The call to participate in the initiation of that reversal, implicit in the beatitudes and woes, will be made explicit through the dominical imperatives in the rest of the Gospel, beginning immediately in the remainder of the Sermon on the Plain, where “the portion of the sermon that is about conduct, 6:27–49, presupposes the contours of the kingdom established in 6:20–26.”⁴⁰

1.4 *The Dominical Response to the Baptist’s Question, Luke 7:18–23* (Matt 11:2–6)

As the narrative reading of Luke progresses, the next passage that demonstrates an explicit pairing of the themes of reversal and right response and the

37 Topel, *Children*, 115.

38 See Krüger, “Conversion,” 177–78.

39 Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 250, my translation.

40 S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 170.

motif of wealth and possessions is the arrival of envoys from John the Baptist. Between the beatitudes and this text are found the remainder of the Sermon on the Plain (6:27–49) and a pair of miracles (7:1–17).⁴¹ In Luke 7:18–23, two disciples of John the Baptist (who has been “offstage” since being shut up in prison by both Herod and the narrator in 3:20) come to Jesus to ask him a question on behalf of their teacher: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (7:19). The question is prompted in the narrative by the report John has received of “all these things” (7:18), a phrase that encompasses at least the two immediately preceding miracles (7:1–17), but most likely includes everything that Luke has narrated since the end of the introduction—the call of the disciples, various healings, and the dominical preaching. The question, put to Jesus in a very public setting, asks him to define the nature of his ministry and to clarify his identity.

Jesus’ answer to John’s query is given first in deeds—so that the questioners become eyewitnesses (7:21)⁴²—and then in words that resound with the themes of reversal and right response (7:22). The answer is expressed in Isaianic terms,⁴³ with evocative echoes of Jesus’ programmatic ministry statement in Luke 4. In the Nazareth sermon, preaching good news to the poor (εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς, 4:18) stood at the head of the list of his Spirit-anointed activities, providing the interpretive category for the rest. Here, in response to John’s question about Jesus’ messianic identity, πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται stands as an emphatic summary statement at the end of the list of activities (7:22).⁴⁴ What was expressed as a purposeful infinitive in 4:18 is now a present reality in 7:22: “the good news *is being proclaimed* to the poor.” In the crescendo effect produced by the series of identity-defining activities, one might expect “the dead are being raised” to crown the list, particularly given the narrative context (directly after the raising of the widow’s son). But Luke places “the poor have good news brought to them” in the climactic final position, making it the summative categorization of Jesus’ ministry.⁴⁵

As in the Nazareth sermon and the Lukan beatitudes, in the answer to John’s question, Jesus once again establishes the parameters and characteristics of his ministry in terms of radical reversal: the blind, lame, lepers, deaf, and dead

41 See Chapter 4.

42 See Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 281.

43 See, e.g., Isaiah 26:19; 29:18–19; 35:5–6; 61:1.

44 See Walter E. Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1981), 72.

45 Bruce Longenecker observes accurately that good news to the poor here is not an anticlimax in the list but rather its culmination and capstone. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 120.

become sighted, firm-footed, clean, hearing, and living persons. That reversal is summed up once again as “good news to the poor.” And Jesus makes clear that a right response to him (not taking offense at the one who brings about these reversals) will result in blessing (7:23).⁴⁶

1.5 *The Women Disciples, Luke 8:1–3*

The explicit link between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions, established in the Lukan introduction and present in the call of the disciples (5:1–11), the call of Levi (5:27–32), the beatitudes and woes (6:20–26), and the dominical response to John (7:18–23), receives continued emphasis as the Gospel narrative progresses. The next passage that explicitly links the two is the opening paragraph of Luke 8, which takes the disciples from silent witnesses of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 5–7) to active participants in it.

In this key summary text (Luke 8:1–3),⁴⁷ both the Twelve and some women are “with Jesus,”⁴⁸ a Lukan way of synthesizing the essence of discipleship (8:3; 9:18; 22:56).⁴⁹ Luke focuses attention on the women by naming some of them (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna) and by describing their antecedents with Jesus: they have been the recipients of the εὐαγγέλιον of release from the oppression of “evil spirits and infirmities” (8:2) and they have responded to this reversal of circumstances by serving Jesus (8:3). This Lukan portrait of the female disciples of Jesus not only continues to build upon the theme of reversal and right response, it also demonstrates the direct link between that theme and the Lukan motif of wealth and possessions.⁵⁰ Luke identifies the women as “right responders” (i.e., disciples, those who have left and followed) and characterizes their discipleship by their use of possessions: “they were serving

46 ὅς ἐστιν in the makarism (Luke 7:23) extends its reach beyond John to whomever will respond appropriately to Jesus. See Bock, *Luke* 1:669.

47 Turid Seim notes rightly the summative nature of Luke 8:1–3. The “pericope does not deal with one particular episode, but gives a dense description covering the general situation,” making it “representative of the stage in the narrative at which it is inserted.” Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts*, trans. Brian McNeil (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 29.

48 No new verb is given for the women; they, like the previously mentioned men, are with Jesus. See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 93.

49 See Rosalie Ryan, “The Women from Galilee and Discipleship in Luke,” *BTB* 15 (1985): 56–59 (56).

50 This is the first appearance of ὑπαρχόντων, a key Lukan term (cf. 11:21; 12:15, 33, 44; 14:33; 16:1; 19:8; Acts 4:32).

them [Jesus and his gathered community] from their possessions.”⁵¹ Although there is no explicit mention of “leaving,” their itineration with Jesus clearly implies a leaving of home and household responsibilities, and their “following” is characterized by their use of material resources.

1.6 *The Parable of the Rich Fool, Luke 12:13–21*

After the summary of discipleship (Luke 8:1–3), the next pericope that explicitly pairs the themes of reversal and right response with the motif of wealth and possessions is the uniquely Lukan parable of the rich fool (12:13–21). This is the first of four parables in the central Travel Narrative (9:51–19:27), all unique to Luke, that deal directly with possessions.⁵² Thus this is an appropriate moment to examine briefly the function of Luke’s parables, which Stephen Wright suggests come to the reader with both indicative and imperatival force.⁵³ In their indicative aspect, they narrate the nature and presence of the kingdom; in their imperatival function, they invite readers to a change of conduct, attitude, and worldview.⁵⁴ Wright argues persuasively that when Luke’s parables are read in the context of the Evangelist’s well-documented concern with matters of wealth and poverty, the indicative or descriptive use of riches in a parable—even when the main point of the parable is something other than wealth—will almost certainly have imperatival overtones related to the use of material possessions.⁵⁵

This particular parable about a rich man is embedded in a larger narrative context in which two thematic strands are interwoven. The first strand

51 My translation of διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς. Klein’s comment is accurate, “Walking with Jesus and the willingness to give goods is perfect discipleship (cf. 18:22; 19:8).” *Das Lukasevangelium*, 301, my translation.

52 The others are 14:12–33; 16:1–13; 16:19–31. Metzger, *Consumption*, 13–15, finds the interpretive key to Luke’s entire wealth ethic in these parables, read through the lens of the Nazareth sermon. I am arguing that such an interpretive lens is not broad enough (it should include the entirety of the Lukan introduction), but these uniquely Lukan parables in the Travel Section certainly express, in most explicit form, Luke’s perspective on wealth and possessions.

53 Stephen I. Wright, “Parables on Poverty and Riches (Luke 12:13–21; 16:1–13; 16:19–31),” in *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 217–39 (217).

54 Stephen I. Wright, “Reading Luke, Hearing Jesus, and Understanding God: Reflections on Some Hermeneutical Issues—a Response to John Nolland.” In *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony C. Thiselton, *Scripture and Hermeneutics* 6 (Gloucestershire: University of Gloucestershire, 2005), 210–66 (221). See also the discussion in Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 127.

55 Wright, “Reading Luke,” 214.

is conflict: the overt hostility to Jesus shown by scribes and Pharisees (Luke 11:53–54) and Jesus' brutally frank criticism of his opponents (11:37–52; 12:1–3). The second strand is Jesus' exhortation against two unacceptable postures toward material wealth: greed and anxiety (12:8–34). The immediate narrative setting of the parable is a rude interruption to these dominical teachings by an unnamed and uncategorized man who asks Jesus to adjudicate in an inheritance dispute (12:13).

Jesus' response to the abrupt request is two-fold. First, he answers the petitioner with a brusque negation that indicates both the inappropriateness of the request and his unwillingness to engage it: "Man,⁵⁶ who set me to be judge or arbiter over you (plural)?" (Luke 12:14). Secondly, he turns to "them" (i.e., the disciples),⁵⁷ and gives a warning that reveals his assessment of the questioner's motives and sets up the parable: "Take care! Be on your guard against *all kinds of greed*; for one's life does not consist in *the abundance of possessions*" (12:15, emphasis added). Given the context of a warning against greed, the NEB may capture even more adequately the sense of Jesus' words: "Even when a man has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life."⁵⁸

The parable begins with a "certain rich man" (Luke 12:16). The warning against greed (12:15) in the immediate context prepares readers for a negative portrayal of this character within the story; the narrative lines running throughout Luke 5–11 also produce expectations of some kind of reversal in his circumstances. These expectations are not disappointed. The rich man's response to abundance (εὐφόρησεν ἡ χώρα, 12:16) is abundantly selfish and self-congratulatory; his only concern is to find a way to keep it all for himself.⁵⁹ The man's unwavering self-focus is revealed in a brief interior monologue,⁶⁰ which is dominated by first-person singular verbs and pronouns.⁶¹ His selfish ruminations are terminated abruptly by the divine assessment: "You fool!"

56 NRSV softens Ἀνθρώπε to "Friend," thus mitigating the harshness of Jesus' words.

57 The last-mentioned addressees are the disciples (12:1), although the crowd (and probably the Pharisees) are assumed as co-listeners (11:57; 12:13). Seccombe, *Possessions*, 139, argues that the crowd is the principal addressee.

58 As Metzger, *Consumption*, 68, observes, this warning fits the Hellenistic concept of greed (πλεονεξία) as an "insatiable desire for more that exceeds normal levels of consumption."

59 John T. Carroll notes that in "a limited-goods economy, the accumulation of goods for the wealthy man necessarily carries with it a diminishing in resources for others." *Luke* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 268.

60 Luke's use of interior monologue in parables to reveal motives and attitudes most often occurs with less-than-noble characters. Philip Sellew, "Interior Monologue as a Narrative Device in the Parables of Luke," *JBL* 111/2 (1992): 239–53 (242, 252).

61 There are nine first-person singular verbs and four first-person singular possessive pronouns in 12:17–19, culminating in "my soul."

(Ἀφρων, 12:20).⁶² Then the divine voice confronts the rich man with an inheritance question: “The things you have prepared, whose will they be?” God, it seems, is interested in the disposition of surplus resources *during* life, while the owner is alive to make decisions about its distribution.

The dominical declaration that sums up the parable (“so it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God,” Luke 12:21) also introduces the subsequent anti-anxiety teaching to the disciples (12:22–32). The parenthesis is then followed by a series of imperatives that identifies clearly what it means to be rich toward God: “Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (12:33–34). Sharing with the poor—a use for wealth that apparently never crossed the mind of the self-focused man in the parable—is what it means to be rich toward God and to store up unfailing treasure in heaven. It is becoming increasingly clear that, for Luke, right response to Jesus includes an inescapable reordering of economic priorities and practices.

1.7 *Two Banquet Parables, Luke 14:7–24*⁶³

Between the parable of the rich fool with its follow-up discourse (12:13–34), and the two banquet parables (Luke 14:7–24), the reader encounters a series of dominical teachings on the cost and urgency of faithful discipleship (12:41–13:35). Luke 14 opens with Jesus on his way to a home, where he will be the invited guest of “a leader of the Pharisees” for Sabbath dinner (14:1).⁶⁴ The hostility inhering in this scene is overt: “they were watching him closely” (i.e., for the purpose of accusing him of something, 14:1).⁶⁵ He provides them an opportunity by healing a man with dropsy. The Pharisees’ indignation with Jesus’ Sabbath conduct remains unspoken (14:4, 6), but Jesus’ criticism of their table behavior is explicitly stated and illustrated (14:7–24).

62 Walter Brueggemann puts it well: God addresses as “fool” the one “who engages in self-destruction by living against the grain of God’s governance.” Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 192.

63 The second part of this segment, Luke 14:14–24, has parallels in Matt 22:1–14 and Thomas 64. For the image of the eschatological banquet that dominates the second Lukan parable, see Isa 39:12; Mal 1:11; 2 Baruch 29:6–8.

64 As Robert C. Tannehill suggests, this dinner scene and its dominical teaching keep the reader’s attention on the cost of following Jesus, as the norms and values of the kingdom threaten established patterns of social advantage. Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke’s Story: Essays on Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2005), 61–66.

65 Each scene with Pharisees as table companions or hosts shows increasingly overt hostility from these religious leaders toward Jesus. Compare this scene with 7:36–50 and 11:37–54.

After the Sabbath healing (Luke 14:2–6), Luke immediately turns the reader's attention to Jesus' assessment of "banquet behavior." Here we find common social practices that are reversed in the kingdom of God. Meal-time behaviors—who sits where, who is invited to participate—reflect insider-outsider categorizations; this meal scene, like the others in Luke-Acts, is essentially about the issue of who are the insiders in the kingdom of God and who may gather with him at the table.⁶⁶ The three sections of this passage are arranged in a chiasm:⁶⁷

A = a parable told to guests (about human banquets, 14: 7–11)

B = an exhortation to hosts (about human banquets, 14:12–14)

A¹ = another parable told to guests (about God's eschatological banquet, 14:15–24).⁶⁸

The middle element, the one with no parallel, receives the emphasis; therefore, the primary impact of this pericope has to do with *inviting* (καλεῖν occurs 11 times in 14:7–24).⁶⁹ Invitation and hospitality are symbols of one's value system and how one defines the parameters of community;⁷⁰ Jesus calls human hosts to operate out of the value system of the divine host and with his definition of community.

The human hosts are exhorted to reverse the rationale that shapes their guest lists. No longer will invitations be based on who can reciprocate or bring honor to the host (friends, brothers, relatives, rich neighbors, Luke 14:12); the guest list will instead include those who are the recipients of the good news of the kingdom, with whom Jesus delights to share meals, those who cannot repay the invitation or provide honor to the host: the poor, the crippled, the

66 See Richard P. Thompson, "Gathered at the Table: Holiness and Ecclesiology in the Gospel of Luke," in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 76–94 (78). See also John H. Elliott, "Household and Meals vs. Temple Purity: Replications Patterns in Luke-Acts," *BTB* 21 (1991): 102–108 (103).

67 Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 196, also notes the chiastic structure of the pericope, but outlines it differently. *Reading Luke*, 196.

68 A—"he spoke a parable to *the guests*" ("Ἐλεγεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς κεκλημένους), v. 7; B—"he spoke to *the one who had invited him*" ("Ἐλεγεν δὲ καὶ τῷ κεκληκότι αὐτόν), v. 12; A¹—"he said to *him*" (a guest, τις τῶν συνανακειμένων), v. 15.

69 Κεκλημένους (14:7), κληθῆς (14:8, 10), κεκλημένος (14:8), καλέσας (14:9), κεκληκώς (14:10), κεκληκότι (14:12), κάλει (14:13), ἐκάλεσεν (14:16), κεκλημένοις (14:17), κεκλημένων (14:24).

70 See Thompson, "Gathered," 89.

lame, and the blind (14:13).⁷¹ Such persons have nothing to offer in a system of reciprocity. However, Jesus promises that laying aside the pursuit of human honor in meal settings will result in divine blessing: “you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (14:14), presumably because their new guest lists reflect that of God, the eschatological host, who is forming around Jesus a new kind of community (14:21–24).

In the parables that frame the central word to hosts, the conduct of guests is critiqued on two levels. The first parable (Luke 14:7–11) contemplates accepted behavior at earthly banquets: the search for status and honor. At first it seems as if Jesus is simply dispensing practical advice to guests on how to work this established system and thus avoid being shamed. But it becomes clear that Jesus is seeking to overturn the system itself. With the proverb-like punch line—“all who exalt themselves will be humbled (ταπεινωθήσεται), and those who humble themselves will be exalted (ὕψωθήσεται)”⁷²—Jesus reorders the priorities of the guests (14:11). The divine passives indicate that God’s perspective is what will matter in the end, and that it will bring about a radical reversal in status, measured and evaluated according to the standards of the kingdom. Jesus calls them to behave in this world according to the reversed values appropriate to that eschatological world.

The second parable (Luke 14:16–24) contemplates the behavior of those invited to the eschatological banquet hosted by God. With incisive irony, Jesus responds to “one of the dinner guests” (14:15), who has apparently fixed his attention on the final bit of Jesus’ words to would-be hosts: “You will be repaid and blessed at the resurrection of the righteous” (14:14). As a member of the religious elite, this man assumes himself to be included with “the righteous,” and so bursts out: “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (14:15).⁷³ He has failed to note that future blessedness is tied to kingdom-worthy behavior in the present. Jesus responds with a story that describes the guest list for the eschatological banquet in terms of the very people this man

71 “In 14:12–14 Jesus is not simply instructing the host to give charity to the poor, which might gain honor for the donor and his family, but to invite the poor and disabled to an important social occasion, thereby giving them the honor normally reserved for family and social peers. Furthermore, the use of present-tense imperatives indicates that his is to be a continuing practice, not a single event.” Tannehill, “The Lukan Discourse on Invitations (Luke 14:7–24),” in *The Four Gospels: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, Richard A. Spencer, ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1992), 1603–16 (1613).

72 The proverb is repeated in Luke 18:14. The image of God raising up the lowly echoes the language of the Magnificat (Luke 1:48, 52).

73 See François Bovon, *Luke*, 3 vol. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002–2013), 2:369.

would exclude—the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame (14:21) and those “out in the roads and lanes” (14:23).⁷⁴ The parable makes clear that, by their refusal of table fellowship with such persons in this world, the self-identified “righteous” are making themselves incompatible as table companions of God and his guests in the future world. Their present refusal to invite is equivalent to a future refusal to be invited,⁷⁵ and their seats will be filled at the eschatological table by the very persons they ignore in the present.

Once again, Luke calls his readers’ attention to the inescapable link between a right response to Jesus, the representative of God’s kingdom, and a radical reordering of values and practices according to the priorities of the kingdom. For disciples, the reversed values of the kingdom are to transform their use of material resources in the social realm of hospitality. No longer will their practice of hospitality be shaped by reciprocity and tightly-drawn boundaries; rather, its distinctive will be boundary-less grace, compassion, and generosity, reflecting the character of the eschatological host.

1.8 *The Cost of Discipleship, Luke 14:25–33 (Matthew 10:37–38)*

Hard on the heels of the banquet parables comes an abrupt series of dominical logia on the meaning of “to be my disciple” (εἰναί μου μαθητής, Luke 14:26, 27, 33). The crowd with Jesus may or may not have heard his words to the Pharisees in 14:7–24 (Luke’s transitional δὲ in 14:25 is vague), but the reader brings to this new section awareness of the sharp words about reversed values in the banquet parables. There is no narrated incident or question that prompts Jesus’ staccato series of exhortations; he simply turns and gives unsolicited advice to the large crowds who were traveling with him (14:25). The “crowds” (ὄχλοι) in Luke represent the undifferentiated mass of uncommitted persons,⁷⁶ and here Jesus appears to be confronting them with a moment of decision.⁷⁷ Will they continue going along the road with him, perhaps hoping to share in some messianic blessing merely through proximity, or will they commit to being his disciples?

Within the brief pericope, Jesus states three times the essence of εἰναί μου μαθητής, each declaration falling like a shocking dose of cold water on the hopes

74 “The areas outside the city would have been inhabited by outcast groups (ethnic groups, tanners, traders, beggars, prostitutes).” Garland, *Luke*, 591.

75 On the collective, deliberate nature of the refusal, signaled by ἀπὸ μιᾶς πάντες in 14:18, see Paul H. Ballard, “Reasons for Refusing the Great Supper,” *JTS* 23 (1972): 341–50 (342).

76 E.g., Luke 5:1; 6:17; 8:4, 40; 9:11, 37. Luke consistently distinguishes between “the crowds” and “the disciples.”

77 On the crowds as “pools of neutral persons from whom Jesus might draw disciples,” see Green, *The Gospel*, 564. Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethic*, 133, calls the crowds here “aficionados.”

of those seeking ease and comfort. First, “to be my disciple” means *to hate* the premier human loyalties: family ties and self-love (Luke 14:26).⁷⁸ As Bovon puts it, Jesus claims boldly that “there are unconditional attachments (e.g., being his disciple) that can be lived only to the detriment of other ties.”⁷⁹ Later, when Jesus looks back over how the Twelve have carried out this unconditional attachment to him (18:28–29), both he and they describe it as “leaving” (ἀφίημι) the family ties that had held prior loyalty in their lives. Second, to be Jesus’ disciple means *to carry* (βαστάζει) one’s cross (14:27). Earlier, Jesus spoke of discipleship as a daily decision to “take up” (ἀράτω) the cross (9:23), but here he seems to be focused on the initial, radical shift of loyalty that involves real risk.⁸⁰ “Carrying the cross” seems to be another way of saying “hating one’s own life”; together, the two phrases are filled with the very real possibility of physical death. Finally, εἶναί μου μαθητῆς means *to sell* (ἀποτάσσομαι) all one’s possessions (τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν, 14:33).⁸¹ Coming after the illustrative analogies (14:28–32), this third description of discipleship completes the listing of loyalties most likely to interfere with discipleship: family, security, possessions.⁸² The renunciation of possessions is a discipleship requirement with no exceptions: “none of you” can be a disciple without doing this.⁸³ It is this kind of renunciation of other loyalties that makes discipleship genuine and fruitful (i.e., “salt” retaining its “saltiness,” 14:35).

The call to “give up all your possessions” (14:33) is the second of three renunciation imperatives in Luke (12:33; 18:22). Here, as in Luke 12, the renunciation command is addressed to those who have already made—or are considering—the decision to follow Jesus: “little flock” (12:33) indicates committed disciples and those who “were traveling with him” (14:25) show at least enough interest in discipleship to itinerate with Jesus.⁸⁴ To these persons, Jesus indicates that the nature of discipleship is undivided loyalty to him, and that one expression

78 For the wide-ranging discussions of the impact of “hate” here (metaphorical, comparative, literal), see, e.g., Marshall, *The Gospel*, 592; Nolland, *Luke*, 2:762; and Richard B. Vinson, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2008), 492.

79 Bovon, *Luke*, 2:386.

80 This point is borne out by the two “cost counting” illustrations in vs. 28–32.

81 Hays sees “sell possessions” (14:33; cf. 12:33) as the essential expression of Luke’s teachings on wealth, which displays a variety of manifestations ranging from the minimalism of complete divestiture to the (temporary) departure from job, home, and possessions. Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics*, 80, 133–39.

82 The third description of discipleship—selling one’s possessions—is not present in the Matthean parallel.

83 See the excellent discussion in Thomas E. Schmidt, “Burden, Barrier, Blasphemy: Wealth in Matt 6:33, Luke 14:33, and Luke 16:15,” *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 171–89 (180, 184).

84 In the case of the third renunciation imperative (18:22), the rich ruler may also fall into this second group—interested but undecided.

of that loyalty will be a refusal to grasp wealth and possessions.⁸⁵ Where entanglement with one's possessions threatens exclusive loyalty to Jesus and his kingdom, discipleship will falter.⁸⁶

1.9 *The Parable of the Shrewd Manager, Luke 16:1–13*

Luke 16 continues the extended series of parables prompted by the negative response of the Pharisees to Jesus' mission of inclusion for the excluded (i.e., "preaching good news to the poor"). The reversal of insider-outsider categories was expressed through two banquet parables in Luke 14 and three lost-become-found stories in Luke 15;⁸⁷ now, in Luke 16, it is set in two parables about rich men.⁸⁸ While Luke 14 and 15 criticized the Pharisees—the regnant "insider" group—for their attitude towards outsiders, Luke 16 challenges their attitude toward wealth.⁸⁹ Lack of concern for the poor and excluded is inextricably linked, in Luke's thought world, with concern for status, honor, and wealth.

Without a clear change of time or setting,⁹⁰ the narrative carries the reader directly from the parable of the loving father of lost sons to the story of a rich man and his wasteful,⁹¹ unscrupulous steward.⁹² Although the rich mas-

85 In 12:33, this refusal is paired with a ready willingness to help the poor: "Sell your possessions and give alms" (emphasis added).

86 See the discussion of the three renunciation texts in Dennis J. Ireland, *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God: An Historical, Exegetical, and Contextual Study of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1–13* (Leiden: Brill, 1992): 182–86.

87 See Chapter 4.

88 Ireland, *Stewardship*, 121–22, notes that in the flow of Luke 14–16, the polemical nature of the parables in Luke 15 give an extra edge of sharpness to those in Luke 16. For excellent summaries of the thematic and contextual links between Luke 15 and Luke 16, see John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1989), 167–68; and L. John Topel, "On the Injustice of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–13)," *CBQ* 37 (1975): 216–27 (233–25).

89 As Donahue, *The Gospel*, 174, puts it: "The thread then that unites all the material from 15:1 to 16:31 is Jesus' defense of those on the margin of society who can be victimized by the rich and powerful. This defense is the 'good news of the kingdom' which has been preached since John (Luke 16:16)."

90 Luke 16 opens with an indeterminate καί.

91 The steward is accused of "scattering" (διασκορπίζων, Luke 16:1) the master's wealth, echoing the description of the younger son's behavior in the previous parable (15:13, διεσκόρπισεν).

92 Miguel de la Torre provocatively names the steward a "trickster" (*joderón* is the rather vulgar Spanish original), part of a whole coterie of tricksters in Scripture, who engage in deception to achieve personal gain, survival, salvation for their people, or truth. De la Torre, *Latino/a Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 4.

ter (ἀνθρῳπός τις ἦν πλοῦσιος) appears first, it is the steward (οἰκονόμος) who occupies center stage in the story (Luke 16:1–8a).⁹³ The variety of adjectives used by translators to describe the main character in Luke 16:1–13 is indicative of the parable’s interpretive challenge. The master’s commendation of the steward’s self-serving actions as φρονίμως (16:8a) is rendered variously in the English versions as “wise” (KJV, NLT), “shrewd” (NRSV, NIV, NASB), or “dishonest” (GNT), while commentators attempt to clarify with adjectives like “crafty,” “cunning,” “rogue,” “wasteful,” and “unjust.”⁹⁴ These appellations are sometimes applied to the man’s *character*, although φρονίμως is an adverb that qualifies his *actions* (“he *did* wisely,” φρονίμως ἐποίησεν).⁹⁵ Jesus provides the actual character description, calling him “the *dishonest* manager” (οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀδικίας, 16:8a). The man’s action is praised by his master within the parable,⁹⁶ but his character is not applauded by Jesus the story-teller.

The interpretive key to the story is found in the dominical commentary (Luke 16:8b–13). Jesus assesses the steward’s action in relationship to dishonest wealth (μαμωνᾶς τῆς ἀδικίας, 16:9) and draws correlations to the life of his followers. First, he distinguishes between two groups: “the children of this age” and “the children of light” (16:8b). The steward represents the children of this age and operates shrewdly toward “his generation” within the value system of this age. The children of light should also act shrewdly (or wisely) toward others, but according to the eschatological values of the age to come. Two different ages demonstrate different paradigmatic values (reciprocity vs. compassion)—and each system expresses itself through a particular orientation toward resources.⁹⁷ Second, Jesus encourages the “children of light” to use “mammon” to “make friends”—this is the parallel to the steward’s action within the parable (16:9). The steward “made friends” through counter-cultural generosity and debt-reduction.⁹⁸ That is a use of money that has

93 See Kyoung-Jin Kim, *Stewardship and Almsgiving in Luke’s Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 154.

94 Respectively: Bock, *Luke*, 2:1323; Carroll, *Luke*, 320; Brendan Byrne, “Forceful Stewardship and Neglectful Wealth: A Contemporary Reading of Luke 16,” *Pacifica* 1 (1988): 1–14; E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1983), 198; Vinson, *Luke*, 519.

95 Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics*, 143, correctly notes that in Matthew and Luke, φρονίμως describes persons who “recognize and respond decisively to their eschatological location.”

96 Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 541, makes the insightful observation that the master’s praise comes from the perspective of a *rich* man, one “who is captive to earthly things” (my translation).

97 See Carlson, “Luke’s Stewarding Vision,” 280.

98 “His generous act, so open to criticism from many points of view, has the distinction of making debtors enter the world of pardon, of giving, of remission of debt, ultimately of grace.” Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, 97.

eternal rewards. (The consequences of failure to use wealth in this way will be illustrated graphically in the next parable, 16:19–31.) Third, Jesus’ measure for evaluating someone’s behavior with wealth is the distinction between a faithful steward (ὁ πιστὸς) and a dishonest steward (ὁ ἄδικος, 16:10). Faithfulness with “unrighteous mammon” is a testing ground for stewardship of true wealth (τὸ ἀληθινόν, 16:11). At issue is the *character* of the disciple, which is reflected in how he or she handles material resources. Fourth, Jesus reminds the children of light that wealth in the present is always a matter of *stewardship*; it always belongs to another (τῷ ἄλλοτρίῳ, 16:12). It is only in the eschatological future that *ownership* will be given, as a reward for faithful stewardship in the present (16:11–12). The children of light are to handle resources on behalf of their Lord and out of his value system.⁹⁹ Finally, Jesus insists that wealth has the potential to become a “master” (κύριος, 16:13), rather than a resource.¹⁰⁰ The place of ultimate loyalty in life can be occupied by only one Lord—either God or money; the two are mutually exclusive.¹⁰¹

Perhaps more clearly than any other text thus far in Luke, Jesus’ commentary on this parable illustrates the fundamental question at issue when discipleship (right response) and material possessions intersect. Which will be the κύριος, God or mammon? And which age’s values will shape the disciple’s life, the reciprocity ethic that governs this age or the compassionate generosity that reflects the new age?

1.10 *The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16:14–31*

The parable of the steward opens Luke 16; the parable of the rich man and Lazarus closes the chapter. Both are unique to Luke; both call for responsible, eschatologically-shaped stewardship of material wealth in the present; and both are linked to Pharisaic grumbling about Jesus’ call to share table fellowship and resources with the poor. Between the two parables is a sharp dominical rebuke to the Pharisees, whom the narrator characterizes as “lovers of money” (16:14),¹⁰² delivered in terms that provide the interpretive key for what follows: “what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of

99 As Ireland, *Stewardship*, 198, correctly notes, “The prudent use of material possessions counselled by our parable is both proof of one’s citizenship in the kingdom and an actualization of the values of the kingdom in anticipation of its final manifestation.”

100 As Metzger, *Consumption*, 180, observes, “Jesus for the first time appears to personify mammon as an evil, powerful cosmic force diametrically opposed to God’s plan of release for captives and freedom for the oppressed (4:18).”

101 See Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church*, trans. Helen White (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 23–29.

102 What the narrator states explicitly about the Pharisees in 16:14 was already implied by Jesus in 16:13. See David B. Gowler’s insights in “At His Gate Lay a Poor Man’: A Dialogic Reading of Luke 16:19–31,” *PRSt* 32 (2005): 249–65 (254).

God” (16:15). “Abomination” (βδέλυγμα) is used in Deuteronomy to refer to idols and idolatry (Deut 7:25–26; 18:12), which makes it an apt word choice here, in the context of mutual opposition of God and mammon as masters (Luke 16:13).¹⁰³ The entirety of Luke 16 provides a reversal of accepted human understanding of the purpose and good use of wealth; the self-preservation and self-indulgence of the main characters in the parables are shown to be abomination from God’s perspective. In the life of the disciple, such attitudes toward wealth must be replaced with generous sharing of resources with those in need.

Luke sets the stage for his parable of the rich man and Lazarus with unusual attention to sensory detail. The first character is presented in typically indefinite fashion—“a certain man who was rich” (ἄνθρωπος τις ἦν πλούσιος)—but then extra information is given about his luxurious wardrobe of “purple and fine linen” and his “splendid” (λαμπρῶς) daily feasts (Luke 16:19). At this point in a narrative reading of the Gospel, the reader is primed to expect a negative characterization of the rich man, particularly following so closely after Jesus’ rebuke of the money-loving Pharisees (16:14); therefore, the details about his lifestyle solidify the reader’s perception that the man is extremely self-indulgent.¹⁰⁴ The second character is introduced initially in parallel fashion: “a certain poor man” (πτωχὸς δέ τις).¹⁰⁵ But suddenly everything changes—the poor man is named! He is the only named character in a Lukan parable, and his naming anticipates the coming reversal of circumstances by overturning “the normal anonymity of poverty and the individuating significance of wealth.”¹⁰⁶ The unnamed, undifferentiated “poor” (Luke 6:20; 14:13, 21) and the anonymous neighbor (10:25–37) now have a name and a face.¹⁰⁷ The portrait of the two characters is completely antithetical: luxurious clothing vs. “covered in sores,” sumptuous feasts vs. crumbs, feasting (active) vs. longing to be fed (passive).¹⁰⁸ Throughout the story, the rich man remains unnamed and

103 Luke Timothy Johnson notes that “abomination” may explain the seemingly odd joining of laws in vs. 16–18, since it is used not only of idolatry but also of financial injustice (Deut 25:16) and in a divorce-related case (Deut 24:4). Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 255.

104 On the excesses inherent in Jesus’ portrait of this man, see John Paul Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 135.

105 Rich and poor in such close proximity hearkens back to 6:20–26.

106 Nolland, *Luke* 2:828.

107 On the function of “naming” within a narrative, see Michael Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 89–90.

108 Metzger believes that the antithetical portrait is intentionally exaggerated for effect. “It is almost inconceivable that abundance and poverty can coexist in such close proximity for so long without any alteration.” *Consumption*, 137. A few days spent in any urban center in Latin America would cure Metzger’s incredulity about the realism of Jesus’ story!

deliberately unseeing;¹⁰⁹ there is no interaction between him and Lazarus in life,¹¹⁰ and even in death he ignores the former beggar except for the selfish use he can make of him (16:24).¹¹¹ In contrast, Lazarus is named four times (16:20, 23, 24, 25) and is seen and welcomed by Abraham, a figure of legendary hospitality (Gen 18:1–16) and the authoritative voice for God in the parable.¹¹²

The parable divides neatly into two scenes. The first takes place on earth (Luke 16:19–22); the second is set in the afterlife (16:23–31), on either side of a “great chasm” (16:26) that implacably divides the two destinies.¹¹³ In the second scene, each man’s location is a direct reversal of his circumstances in the first. Lazarus, ignored by those who had the means to alleviate his suffering, is granted respite, relief, and intimate fellowship “in the bosom of Abraham,” while the rich man’s use of his “good things” (τὰ ἀγαθὰ) for his exclusive pleasure on earth results in unalleviated agony in Hades after death.¹¹⁴ The easily perceptible message, especially in a sequential reading of the Gospel, is that this rich man was judged not for his wealth per se, but because he was not rich toward God (12:21), he did not store up an unfailing treasure in heaven through relinquishment of wealth in almsgiving (12:33), he did not invite Lazarus to his table (14:12–14), and he did not make friends for himself by means of unrighteous mammon (16:9). As Miguel de la Torre puts it, the man’s judgment was based “solely on the fact that he was rich and failed to share his resources with those, like Lazarus, who lacked the basics for survival.”¹¹⁵

109 He is not unaware of Lazarus’ identity (see 16:24); he simply ignores his presence.

110 Feuillet sees here one of the clearest links back to the previous parable: “We have the exact antithesis of behavior demanded of the rich in the parable of the shrewd steward: should they not use their wealth to make friends among the poor?” (my translation). A. Feuillet, “La parabole du mauvais riche et du pauvre Lazare (Luc 16, 19–31), antithèse de la parabole de l’intendant astucieux (Luc 16, 1–9),” *NRTh* 101 (1979): 212–23 (212).

111 “Have mercy on *me*” and “send Lazarus to cool *my* tongue”; apparently Lazarus has been upgraded from invisible man to lackey!

112 See Andrew E. Arterbury, “Abraham’s Hospitality among Jewish and Early Christian Writers: A Tradition History of Gen 18:1–16 and Its Relevance for the Study of the New Testament,” *Journal of the NABPR* 30 (2003): 359–76 (especially the summary on 373).

113 So far it has not been noticed, but the first scene is arranged as a chiasm, whose emphasis falls on the poor man’s earthly life and death:

A = the rich man’s life (16:19)

B = the poor man’s life (16:20–21)

B¹ = the poor man’s death (16:22a)

A¹ = the rich man’s death (16:22 b)

114 It is interesting that the last reference to this character as “the rich man” is in the statement of his earthly death (16:22b). Throughout the heavenly scene, he is simply an unnamed “he” (αὐτὸς, 16:24; αὐτῷ, 16:31).

115 Miguel de la Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 79.

The heavenly scene of the parable presents two requests from the rich man to Abraham, both of which are refused. First, the man requests personal relief—cooling water to be delivered by Lazarus (Luke 16:24). He addresses his petition to “Father Abraham.” Abraham responds to him as “child” (16:25), but not “*my* child”; the rich man’s refusal to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (cf. Luke 3:8–11) during his earthly life makes him unable now to claim the relationship with Abraham.¹¹⁶ Second, he requests a special envoy—Lazarus again!—to his brothers (16:27), to spare them his same fate.¹¹⁷ This request is also refused by Abraham, because the five brothers already have the same sufficient witness that the rich man had ignored: “Moses and the prophets” (16:29, 31), the law whose core ethos includes care of the poor.¹¹⁸

The reversal that Luke had place on Mary’s lips in song (Luke 1:46–55) and on Jesus’ lips in a sermon (6:20–26) has now been made explicit in a parable.¹¹⁹ This parable is a warning to rich disciples and would-be followers of Jesus. Failure to choose the reversed values of “the age to come” in their handling of wealth in this life renders their discipleship false (“salt with no saltiness,” 14:34–35) and augurs an eschatological reversal of their present circumstances. Luke continues to insist that right response to Jesus and his message always involves the renunciation of personal benefit from wealth for the sake of the poor.

1.11 *The Rich Ruler, Luke 18:18–30 (Matt 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31)*

The next pericope that directly links the themes of reversal and right response with the motif of wealth and possessions, is the story of Jesus’ encounter with a rich man (Luke 18:18–30). It comes at a crucial point in the Lukan narrative. In the immediate context, it continues to respond to the question about who can enter the kingdom of God, an issue that has been steadily building since Luke 14 and that is addressed directly by Jesus’ words about children: “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive

116 See Tannehill, *Luke*, 251, and Gowler, “Dialogic Reading,” 256.

117 Despite the rebuke he has already received, he continues to address Abraham as “father” (16:27, 30). Even in the midst of his punishment, he refuses to be reshaped by kingdom realities.

118 Brueggeman, *Money*, 199, correctly observes about Abraham’s refusal: “The rich man and his family are left to the tradition of Moses and the Torah, with its summons to a neighborly economy and its harsh sanctions for those who refuse such neighborliness.” See also the fine discussion of the Torah tradition of honoring God by caring for neighbors in Liz Theoharris, *Always with Us? What Jesus Really Said about the Poor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 64–70.

119 See York, *The Last*, 62–63.

the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (18:16–17). Various expression of this theme come together in synonymous parallelism in the story of the rich ruler: "inherit eternal life" (18:18, 30), "enter the kingdom of God" (18:24, 25), and "be saved" (18:26).¹²⁰ The key human step toward such a destiny is to "follow Jesus" (18:22, 28). In the broader context of the Gospel, Luke's entire narrative from chapter five onward has been replete with commentary, both direct and indirect, on the potential barriers to such a right response, not the least of which is wealth. So it is highly fitting that, at the climax of Luke's cumulative picture of the tension between riches and discipleship, he chooses to include not another parable on the theme but two stories of "real life" encounters between Jesus and wealthy would-be disciples. The first, the encounter with the rich ruler, will illustrate the power of mammon's lordship to impede discipleship (18:18–30); the second, Zacchaeus' story (19:1–10), will demonstrate a genuine transfer of loyalty from wealth to God.

In the encounter with the ruler, Luke withholds the characterization of the would-be disciple as "rich" until well into the story (Luke 18:23), introducing him simply as "a certain ruler" (τις ἄρχων, 18:18). The fact that he is an ἄρχων, however, hints at his wealth and high status, and sets him in direct contrast to the powerless children of the previous pericope.¹²¹ This unnamed member of the elite greets Jesus in a seemingly respectful manner ("Good Teacher," 18:18), then asks for a get-into-the-kingdom checklist: "What must I do (τί ποιήσας) to inherit eternal life?"¹²² This ruler apparently refuses to accept what Jesus has just said about the need to adopt the status of a child (humble insignificance) in order to enter the kingdom.¹²³

Jesus' first response is not to the man's question but to the polite address he has used. Rather than returning courtesy for courtesy, Jesus questions his motive: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Luke 18:19). The tone of the dominical question is laced with irony: "You call me good—an appellation reserved for God—but refuse to acknowledge that my words are God's authoritative word to you."¹²⁴ Then he reminds the ruler that he

120 Contra Green, *The Gospel*, 658, who sees the synonymous nature of the phrases in this pericope as only ironic.

121 Johnson, *Luke*, 280, says, "Luke deliberately accentuates the contrast [with the children], by making the rich man a 'ruler' (*archon*). This small touch changes the character of the story, for in Luke, the rulers are steadfastly against the prophet."

122 The identical question of the lawyer in Luke 10:25.

123 There is no change of scene at Luke 18:18, so the reader may assume that the ruler was present for Jesus' words about the children.

124 For the range of interpretive options for the meaning and tone of Jesus' question to the ruler, see Bock, *Luke* 2:1478. Bock shies away from seeing irony in Jesus' words, but it seems to me an inescapable reading.

already knows the desired checklist—the “horizontal” commands from the Decalogue (18:20), the ones about how to treat others. Being reminded that he knows the commands is tantamount to an order to obey them. Readers hear echoes of Abraham’s counsel to another rich man in an earlier story: “Listen to Moses and the prophets—you already have a sufficient checklist, why are you asking me for another?” (Luke 16:29, my paraphrase). However, Jesus’ list of commandments contains a significant omission; he leaves out, “You shall not covet.”¹²⁵ Jesus knows what the narrator has kept implicit—this is a wealthy man, one with a distorted relationship to his money.¹²⁶ The ruler can respond to the truncated list of requirements with full confidence in his piety: “All *these* things I have kept from my youth” (18:21, emphasis added). The problem, as Jesus is fully aware, is with that *other* thing—the unspoken commandment, the imperative that confronts a heart bent on acquisition. So Jesus speaks shocking words to this confidently pious rich man: “There is still one thing lacking in you” (or, “lacking to you,” 18:22).¹²⁷ Jesus does not argue about the man’s piety; he simply characterizes it as incomplete. He expresses the glaring omission not in the negative parlance of the Decalogue (“you shall not covet”), but in a series of positive imperatives, consistent with the pattern Luke has been developing: sell all, distribute to the poor, come, follow me (18:22). Because right response to Jesus includes a right response to the poor, the “one thing lacking” to the rich man encompasses this whole package of imperatives.¹²⁸

The ruler’s reaction is sadness, because he is very rich (ἦν πλούσιος σφόδρα, Luke 18:23). He desires to inherit eternal life—but does he want it enough to change his first loyalty in this life? He has discovered that he is an idolater,¹²⁹ and his first response is sadness. It is not the sorrow of repentance, but the poignant realization that he has already pledged fealty to a κύριος that leaves no room for following Jesus. His sadness prompts a summative dominical commentary on wealth and discipleship: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (18:24, 25). Those who hear—presumably both rich and poor—are shocked at

125 Matthew makes the same omission (Matt 19:19); Mark has μὴ ἀποστερήσης (Mark 10:19).

126 See Ellul’s discussion of the ruler’s relationship with his wealth, in *Money and Power*, 86.

127 My translation. The NRSV fails to express the pointed, personal impact of σοι λείπει. This is a significant grammatical detail more easily captured in Spanish: “Aún te falta una cosa” (RV60).

128 Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News*, 25, makes the keen observation that “this rejection of the wealth of this world in favor of those who have none is a clear sign and evidence that a fundamental change has taken place in the rich man’s heart.”

129 Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 202, also assesses the man’s condition as idolatry.

this overturning of common expectations. If the rich (i.e., those apparently blessed by God) cannot get in, then who can be saved (18:26)? Jesus' reply is hope-filled for persons of wealth contemplating discipleship: "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God" (18:27).¹³⁰ Peter then breaks into the conversation, bringing the focus back to the key verb pair for discipleship in Luke: leave (ἀφίημι) and follow (ἀκολουθέω). It is these two actions, already practiced by the disciples (18:28) and affirmed by Jesus (18:29–30), that will open "the divine possibility" for rich persons to become disciples. Luke leaves open the potential for even *this* rich ruler to experience the divine possibility, since he does not remove him from the scene as the other Evangelists do (Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22). Perhaps he too will leave (his wealth) and follow.

1.12 *Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1–10*

The second of the pair of encounters that forms the climax of Luke's portrait of rich persons in the Gospel is the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). The unnamed rich man in the previous story (18:18–30) illustrates negatively the "woes" of wealth proclaimed by Jesus (see 6:24–26; 18:24); his entanglement with his money is an impediment to genuine discipleship. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, illustrates the discipleship potential for a rich man who will heed the warnings and exchange the lordship of mammon for that of God.¹³¹ Between these two climactic encounters of Jesus with wealthy men is the third dominical foretelling of his coming death and resurrection (18:31–34) and the healing of a blind beggar (18:35–43). It is no accident that between the climactic negative and positive examples of discipleship, there appears an encounter with a marginalized person, since the cumulative portrait of discipleship in the Gospel has been linked to behavior toward the poor and needy. The rich man in Luke 18 falters on that very requirement (18:22, 23), while Zacchaeus' visible transformation into a disciple of Jesus is precisely at the point of his relationship to the poor (19:8).

Luke's initial presentation of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2) is both suggestive and ambiguous, in terms of the expectations it produces in the reader. Luke

¹³⁰ Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 145, notes that "it goes too far to say that one cannot be rich and be a disciple of Jesus, but what never appears in the Gospels are well-to-do followers of Jesus who are not simultaneously generous in almsgiving and in divesting themselves of surplus wealth for the sake of those in need."

¹³¹ As Vincenzo Petracca puts it, Zacchaeus runs through the eye of the needle! Luke's portrayal of Zacchaeus, a rich man who successfully detaches from his property, underlines the liberating power of God that gives hope to wealthy would-be disciples. Petracca, "Lazarus, Zachäus und das Nadelöhr: Geld und Reichtum in der Bibel," *Diakonia* 38 (2007): 18–23 (23).

strings together a compact series of three pieces of data. First, the new character is “a man named Zacchaeus” (ἀνὴρ ὀνόματι καλούμενος Ζακχαῖος, 19:2). He is named and personalized, unlike the “certain ruler” of the previous story (18:18). Second, he is “a chief tax collector” (ἀρχιτελώνης), a unique designation that probably leads the reader to “multiply all assumptions about tax collectors in this instance.”¹³² And third, Zacchaeus is “rich” (πλούσιος). The fact that Zacchaeus is both a (chief) tax collector and wealthy is a combination that sends a mixed message to readers. On the one hand, since the Lukan introduction, tax collectors have been right responders (see 3:13), Jesus’ table companions, outsiders-become-insiders, and, most recently in the narrative, heroes of a parable (18:9–14).¹³³ On the other hand, those persons characterized in Luke as “chiefs” (ἀρχι-, ἄρχων) or as “rich” have often been presented as failing at discipleship (e.g., the rich ruler in 18:18–30) or as outright opponents of Jesus (e.g., the Pharisees, 16:14). As Green notes, “Luke’s audience might assume that the wealthy and those who rule are out, sinners and toll collectors are in. What, then, are we to make of someone who is all of these things?”¹³⁴ This new character appears to have the potential to fall on either end of the spectrum of responses—discipleship accepted or refused.

Zacchaeus’ first actions reveal a lively curiosity (“he was seeking to see who Jesus was,” Luke 19:3), initially impeded by circumstances beyond his control (his small stature,¹³⁵ the milling crowd).¹³⁶ However, he throws dignity and honor to the wind in order to achieve his desired goal, running and climbing a tree (19:4). Jesus sees him, knows him, calls him, and invites himself to stay at his house (19:5), expressing it as a matter of divine necessity (δεῖ). Jesus thereby gives Zacchaeus a chance to receive him and his message. Zacchaeus responds in a manner that serves as the perfect foil to the rich ruler; all of his recorded actions echo the Lukan portrait of genuine discipleship in chapters 5–18: he *obeys* Jesus (“he hurried down,” 19:6), he *welcomes* Jesus joyfully (19:6), he *gives* half his possessions (ὑπαρχόντων) to the poor (19:8), and he promises to *pay back* in quadruple any amount he might have gained through extortion or false

132 Richard P. Thompson, “Gathered,” 82.

133 See Chapter 4.

134 Green, *The Gospel*, 667. See also Tannehill, *The Shape*, 75.

135 In ancient rhetoric, unusual physical characteristics were an occasion for ridicule, so Zacchaeus’ stature, combined with his double characterization as tax collector and rich, presents the reader with “an unmistakable picture of the quintessential outsider.” Thompson, “Gathered,” 83.

136 Green, *The Gospel*, 670, suggests that “on account of the crowd” has causative force—the townspeople deliberately kept Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus.

accusation (19:8).¹³⁷ Implicit in his declaration is the intention to refrain from such conduct in the present and in the future; he commits to both justice and the ongoing practice of generous almsgiving.¹³⁸ He is a living application of the earliest instructions to tax collectors in the Third Gospel (3:13, 14).

Jesus' assessment of Zacchaeus' response is that "today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). The salvation of a rich man, which Jesus previously described as difficult but possible (18:27), is now a reality lived out before their very eyes, demonstrated by the rich man's behavior towards Jesus (welcoming joyfully) and towards the poor (giving generously). Jesus identifies the transformed tax collector as "a son of Abraham" (19:9) because he bears fruit worthy of repentance (see 3:8–12), including a reversal of his economic priorities and practices. Because of his right response to Jesus, who has come to "seek out and to save the lost" (19:10), Zacchaeus' condition and identity are reversed: from lost and excluded to found and included, from scorned sinner to saved son.

1.13 *The Poor Widow's Offering, Luke 21:1–4 (Mark 12:41–44)*

After the pair of stories detailing opposite responses by rich men to Jesus and his message (Luke 18:18–30; 19:1–10), there is a final passage in the Gospel that draws an explicit connection between the theme of right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. In the midst of his temple teaching, full of controversy with chief priests, scribes, and Sadducees (20:1–21:38), Jesus makes a scathing denunciation of scribes as honor-grabbers whose ostentatious piety cloaks a rapacious oppression of the most vulnerable members of society: "they devour widows' houses" (20:45–47). Immediately Luke links this denunciation to the observable offering practices of representatives of these same groups—scribes and widows (21:1–4).

In this scene, Luke sets in contrast "rich persons" (πλουσίους, Luke 21:1) and "a certain poor widow" (τινα χήραν πενιχράν, 21:2).¹³⁹ The narrator's description of her as "needy" (πενιχράν) probably emphasizes the precarious nature of her existence; Jesus will characterize her with the more common form of "poor" (πτωχός) in his commentary (21:3). Given the immediate context, with no explicit transition between Jesus' characterization of the scribes as those

¹³⁷ εἰ + the aorist in 19:8 is somewhat ambiguous. For the perspective that Zacchaeus is defending righteous conduct rather than repenting of unscrupulous practices, see Fitzmyer, *Luke* 2:1220–21. For an excellent counter to Fitzmyer's position, see Dennis Hamm, "Luke 19:8 Once Again: Does Zacchaeus Defend or Resolve?" *JBL* 107 (1988): 431–37 (espec. 433–35).

¹³⁸ Δίδωμι is in the present (continuous) tense.

¹³⁹ By not mentioning the gifts of the crowd, as in Mark 12:41, Luke narrows the focus to the contrast between the rich and the poor widow.

who devour widows' homes while maintaining an outward appearance of piety (20:47) and this new scene,¹⁴⁰ the reader is led to assume that these rich persons are actually scribes. They and the widow appear to start on a level playing field: all are worshipers and all make offerings. However, Jesus quickly makes an incisive distinction between them: their offerings are utterly different in character. Although the widow's offering is miniscule in quantity ("two small coins," λεπτὰ δύο, 21:2),¹⁴¹ Jesus assesses it to be "more than all" (πλεῖον πάντων). This is astonishing, given the probability that rich status-seekers (see 20:45–46) would be seeking to acquire honor through giving large amounts. The distinguishing factor in the two offerings, then, is not the amount, but what the offerings reveal about the givers' relationship with their wealth and possessions. "All these" (πάντες οὗτοι, 21:4) give "out of their abundance" (ἐκ τοῦ περισσεύοντος αὐτοῖς, lit., "from the things that abound to them"). These offerings require no real trust, because they come from the excess, leaving their material security intact.¹⁴² The widow's gift, on the other hand, comes "out of her poverty" (ἐκ τοῦ ὑστερήματος αὐτῆς, lit., "from the things lacking to her"). They give "as gifts" (ἐβαλον εἰς τὰ δῶρα); she gives her entire livelihood (πάντα τὸν βίον ὃν εἶχεν ἐβαλεν).¹⁴³ Once again, Jesus has effectively reversed common expectations about what true piety looks like, particularly at the intersection of faith and material possessions. The widow's gift is "more," in Jesus' estimation, because it reveals a deep, active faith in the God who has declared himself to be the defender of widows (Ps 68:5; 146:9; Prov 15:25).¹⁴⁴

The characters in this story embody the two attitudes to wealth and possessions that Luke has been setting before disciples and would-be disciples throughout his story. Will they cling to material possessions, or will they release them? As Edwards puts it, "For Jesus, the value of a gift is not the amount given, but the cost to the giver; not how much is given, but how much is retained for self."¹⁴⁵ In this sense, the poor widow in Luke 21 may find her antithesis

140 The chapter division masks the thematic unity of 20:45–21:4.

141 A fraction of a denarius (a typical day's wage) and the smallest amount lawful to offer. See Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 228.

142 "After their donations, they are still rich." Garland, *Luke*, 818.

143 "The Greek word *bios* means both 'life itself' and 'means of subsistence.' There are two nuances, 'she put in all the means she had to live on' and 'she put in all the life she had.'" Barbara Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 195.

144 As López Rodríguez, *Liberating Mission*, 101, so accurately puts it, the woman's implicit theology emerges in the public act of her offering: "With her gesture of generosity and of total abandonment in the hands of God, she was confessing that God was her *go'el*, the defender of widows and the one who would lose face for the defenseless."

145 Edwards, *The Gospel*, 590.

in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).¹⁴⁶ In a very concrete way, the widow, by releasing her life/sustenance into the temple treasury, has “left everything”—the quintessential expression of discipleship in Luke.

2 Summary

We saw in Chapter 2 that Luke’s introductory unit (Luke 1–4) establishes close links between the motif of wealth and possessions and the intertwined themes of reversal and right response. In the Lukan introduction, that intersection is set in the context of the mission of Jesus, stated especially clearly in the Magnificat and the Nazareth sermon but also highlighted in the response of human characters to God’s work in Jesus. In the remainder of the Third Gospel, the junction of those elements is extended into the life of those who choose to follow Jesus in his mission. It has been examined in 13 texts in Luke 5–24 that demonstrate an explicit connection between reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions.¹⁴⁷ That analysis has brought to light a cluster of interrelated Lukan emphases, all painting a picture of the disciples’ participation in Jesus’ mission of “proclaiming good news to the poor.” These emphases can now be distilled into five summary statements.

First, the essence of discipleship (i.e., right response to Jesus) is expressed as leaving and following. The “leaving” includes renunciation of wealth as the source of security and status.¹⁴⁸ This point is established immediately after the introduction, in the two paradigmatic call stories (5:1–11, 27–32), as Simon, his companions, and Levi all leave everything and follow Jesus. “Leaving everything” for these disciples involves withdrawing from their sources of income; the rich ruler (Luke 18) is invited to the same kind of withdrawal, on an even more radical scale. For others, the “leaving” seems to mean distancing themselves from normal economic and social practices to dedicate their resources

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁷ By demonstrating that the *entirety* of the Lukan introduction is the appropriate lens through which to read the *entirety* of the Third Gospel’s portrait of wealth and possessions, I have expanded Metzger’s approach (*Consumption*, 2007), since he limits the interpretive lens to the Nazareth sermon and finds its Lukan expression to be most clearly seen in the parables of the Travel Narrative.

¹⁴⁸ With Thomas Phillips, who rightly concludes that “the Third Gospel is critical of any attitude which would attach a sense of self-sufficiency to the possession of economic resources (e.g., the attitude of the rich fool) or which would hope to find security from anxiety in the acquisition of economic resources (e.g., as the disciples were warned to avoid).” Phillips, *Reading Issues of Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2001), 182.

to Jesus and his mission (as in the case of the women disciples, 8:1–3, and Zacchaeus, 19:1–10). For wealthy would-be disciples, the “leaving” includes renouncing the status and honor that accompany wealth. In every case, leaving is an inseparable element of following Jesus.¹⁴⁹

Second, leaving and following are the essential actions of all disciples, not just the Twelve. It is significant that the second call story involves Levi, a tax collector who is not one of the Twelve. His right response is expressed in exactly the same way as theirs (“left everything, followed”) and gives the first indication that Luke is not setting up a two-tier discipleship structure, with stringent requirements for one group and less radical demands for another group. This point is reiterated clearly in 14:33, where Jesus indicates that *no one* can become a disciple without giving up his or her possessions.¹⁵⁰ Every right response to Jesus in Luke includes leaving material wealth as a source of security and status; that leaving takes various shapes in the narrative: giving, selling, renouncing, and using.

Third, the values governing the behavior and attitudes of Jesus’ disciples reflect the priorities of the eschatological kingdom and are a reversal of accepted human norms. Both Jesus’ behavior (especially his choice of table companions) and the stories he tells communicate clearly that a new set of values is in play for the community that is forming around him.¹⁵¹ The insider-outsider categories are being redefined around responsiveness to Jesus and to the poor; the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are now drawn by one’s choice to leave and follow, not by wealth, status, ethnicity, or ritual purity.¹⁵² Righteousness, salvation, inheriting eternal life, and entering the kingdom—all are now recognizable by choices that correspond to Jesus’ mission of “good news to the poor” and “release to the captives.” In terms of wealth and possessions, the regnant ethic of reciprocity is now replaced by an ethic of compassionate generosity that knows no boundaries and expects no repayments; ownership is replaced by stewardship.

149 Concerning this point, I agree with Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethic*, 185, that renunciation (leaving of possessions) is the crucial and consistent principle underlying Luke’s wealth ethic, a principle that manifests itself in a variety of ways in the Gospel.

150 I agree with Hays that 14:33 is the Lukan “gold standard” of discipleship requirements and that the relinquishment of wealth and possessions can take varied forms in its lived-out expression. See Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics*, 173, 185.

151 See, e.g., what Green, *Luke*, 516, calls Jesus’ “topsy-turvy” statements in Luke 11:30; 14:11, and the reversal of conventional wisdom in the parables of the lost sons (15:11–32) and the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31).

152 I find Joel Green’s arguments persuasive on this point; the “inclusion of the excluded” is a major interpretive lens in his commentary on Luke. See in particular his exegesis of the banquet parables in Luke 14. Green, *Luke*, 548–68.

Fourth, Luke's use of "poor" is polyvalent, but "rich" is applied consistently as an economic categorization. Luke uses "poor" as a soteriological category (i.e., those who trust in God and welcome Jesus) when speaking descriptively about disciples (as in the beatitudes), but when speaking prescriptively about the responsibilities of the life of discipleship, he uses "poor" to mean those who live on the margins,¹⁵³ excluded economically, socially, religiously, and culturally from full participation in the community.¹⁵⁴ These groups are the objects of disciples' care and are always addressed as persons ("the poor") rather than as a theoretical condition ("poverty"). When referring to "the rich," however, Luke means literal economic wealth, which is seen as the single most significant impediment to discipleship in the Third Gospel (because it has the potential to be the object of worship).¹⁵⁵ All the examples of rich persons surveyed are negative (i.e., they respond wrongly to Jesus) with the exception of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10).

Fifth, God has a clearly defined will for the use of material surplus. There emerges a clear antithesis between two mutually exclusive responses to "abundance" (surplus, wealth); there is no middle ground between the two options. One is greed, the grasping after abundance (of possessions, status, or honor) for oneself; the other is compassionate generosity. Possessions and wealth are not neutral in Luke; they are either the means by which people exalt themselves at the expense of others, or they are instruments of good news to the poor. The divine assessment of the former option comes most clearly in the parable of the rich man (Luke 12:13–31), when God himself calls the grasping man a fool. The inevitable corollary to greed is lack of concern for the poor, which

¹⁵³ With Green; see especially his commentary on Luke 6:20–26. *Luke*, 267.

¹⁵⁴ Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor*, 113, correctly notes the consistency of Luke's usage with the LXX use of πτωχός, which also has the dual pattern of descriptive (those who count on the Lord's salvation) and prescriptive ("standards of human etiquette toward the poor").

¹⁵⁵ Although Luke Timothy Johnson assigns more of a metaphorical value to both poor and rich in Luke's Gospel, he has captured, perhaps better than anyone, the Lukan sense that wealth is a powerful obstacle to discipleship. "It seems clear, for example, that Luke sees possessions as a primary symbol of human existence, an immediate exteriorization of and manifestation of the self. But the nuances are many. Possessions do not merely express the inner condition of a man's heart; they are also capable of expressing relations between persons and the play of power between persons. Indeed, when all the aspects are brought together, power appears as reality which underpins them all. Possessions are a sign of power. From this central and compelling view of possessions comes their protean metaphorical potential." To pair Johnson's term "exteriorization" with Luke's term "mammon," we might say that, for Luke, attachment to wealth is an exteriorization of mammon's lordship in a person's life. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 221.

is the kingdom option for responsible use of abundance. Disciples of Jesus will be characterized by compassionate almsgiving and by something more startling—identification (i.e., kinship) with the poor, expressed in barrier-less table fellowship.¹⁵⁶

As one reads through the Gospel of Luke, the cumulative force of these five emphases builds a consistent portrait of discipleship (right response) as a life that models the eschatological reversals inaugurated by Jesus, which are inextricably linked to the way that disciples use and respond to wealth and possessions. This has been seen clearly through a narrative reading of the 13 pericopae that make explicit links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions; the picture will be strengthened even further when the next set of texts is added to the reading.

¹⁵⁶ Scholars like Seccombe (*Possessions and the Poor*, e.g. 127, 195) and Pilgrim (*Good News to the Poor*, e.g., 64–66) have built excellent cases for the priority of almsgiving in Luke's wealth ethic, but they tend to focus on the spiritual benefit to the giver (i.e., the wealthy disciple); they see Luke offering a "Christianized" version of the prevailing patron-client system. However, our analysis has shown that the generous charity Jesus models and commands in Luke's Gospel is accompanied by a different kind of social system: boundary-less table fellowship, which levels the social differences and sets kinship in place of benefactor-client divisions.

Reading Luke 5–24 through the Lens of the Introduction (Part 2)

In Chapter 3, thirteen Lukan passages were examined, pericopae that directly link the themes of reversal and right response with the motif of wealth and possessions. In addition, there are eleven Lukan texts that make the same connection in a more implicit or indirect manner.¹ In these passages of reversal and right response, wealth and possessions are not the central focus, but the motif is still present in the background or on the periphery. Like the passages in the first category, these texts are scattered across all sections of the Gospel (Galilean ministry, journey to Jerusalem, Passion narrative) and include a variety of literary forms: dominical teachings and parables, healings and miracles, conversations and conflicts between Jesus and other characters, and commentary from the narrator. Once again, these texts will be examined in narrative sequence. Insights from the narrative reading in the first section will be used to examine how, in these texts of reversal and right response, the subtle or latent links to the motif of wealth and possessions are brought to the surface by the effect of the cumulative picture that Luke is drawing.

1 Lukan Texts of Reversal and Right Response, with Implicit Connections to the Motif of Wealth and Possessions

1.1 *Healings that Demonstrate the Promised ἀφ᾽εσῆς*, Luke 5:12–26 (Matt 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45)

The first text to be examined is a passage that represents a large cluster of texts in Luke.² The healings of a leper and a paralytic (Luke 5:12–26), the very first activity into which the newly called disciples follow Jesus, will be considered here as a paradigm for the larger dominical ministry of healing in the body of the Gospel. Jesus' interaction with the excluded (i.e., "the poor," as shown in Chapter 3) and his deliberate and dramatic reversal of their

1 Luke 5:12–26; 6:27–36; 7:1–10, *11–17, *36–50; 9:10–17, 57–62; *10:25–37; *15:11–32; *18:9–14; 23:50–56. The five starred passages are unique to Luke.

2 See also 6:6–11, 17–19; 7:11–17 (considered below); 8:26–39, 40–56; 9:37–43; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; 17:11–19; 18:35–43.

circumstances is seen in a particularly clear way through his miracles on their behalf.³

The first scene in which the disciples are present with Jesus in Luke's narrative is the restoration of a man whose illness had left him completely excluded from the social and religious life of the community (Luke 5:12–16), since leprosy “was a sentence of social ostracism.”⁴ Probably out of his deep awareness of his “untouchable” condition, the leprous man questions whether Jesus is willing to help him (Luke 5:12). When Jesus demonstrates his willingness, first by deed (he touches him, a ritually dangerous move) and then by word (“be made clean,” 5:13), he is, in effect, releasing a captive, freeing him from the exclusion caused by his disease and restoring him to full participation in the life of the community.⁵ The social implications of this release are clear in the follow-up task that Jesus gives the man: “Show yourself to the priest” (5:14; cf. Lev 13–14)—in Tannehill's words, “be publicly recognized as clean and reintegrated into society.”⁶ Implicit in such a reversal of circumstances—from illness to health, from exclusion to inclusion—is the economic factor—from helpless destitution to the possibility of vigorous productivity.

This first healing in the body of the Gospel is quickly followed by another (Luke 5:17–26), involving a paralyzed man and the friends who actively seek Jesus' help for him. The healing of the paralytic incorporates not only physical restoration, with its implied reversal of social, religious, and economic exclusion, but also includes explicit spiritual renewal, designated as “forgiveness of sins.” A cluster of terms associated with Jesus' healing ministry begins to emerge in these first two narratives: heal (θεραπεύω, 5:15), cleanse (καθαρίζω, 5:12, 14), and forgive (ἀφιέναι, 5:20, 21, 23, 24).⁷ Here is the release (ἄφεσις) promised in the Nazareth declaration, as captives are liberated from spiritual, physical, social, and economic bondage.

1.2 *Right Response Means New Rules of Engagement, Luke 6:27–36* (Matt 5:38–48; 7:12)

As a narrative reading of Luke's Gospel progresses, the reader has heard two clarion calls to follow Jesus (5:1–11, 27–32), each of which provokes the

3 See the discussion in Joseph A. Grassi, *God Makes Me Laugh: A New Approach to Luke* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986), 40.

4 James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 159.

5 As Gowler says, “[If] readers recognize the implicit assumption in the narrative that illnesses have social consequences, then all of Jesus' healing activities actually reflect this proclamation of release” (Luke 4:18–19). “Dialogic Reading,” 252.

6 Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 103.

7 The four-fold use of ἀφιέναι in 5:17–26 strengthens the link with the promised ἄφεσις of 4:18–19.

same response: “they [he] left everything and followed him” (5:11, 28). As seen in Chapter 3, the initial Lukan picture of discipleship includes radical renunciation—a refusal to cling to material wealth for security. In addition, the reader has encountered Jesus’ healing miracles (5:12–26; 6:6–11, 17–19), which bring the promised “release from captivity” (4:18), reversing the physical, spiritual, social, and religious realities of the healed persons. And as Jesus begins his first sermon in the body of the Gospel (6:20–26), the reader hears the parallel beatitudes “to you poor” and woes “to you rich,” both directed to the disciples. There is a growing awareness that, in Luke’s perspective, a right response to Jesus cannot be separated from one’s relationship to wealth and possessions. It is with that cumulative portrait of discipleship in mind that the reader arrives at the second section of the Sermon on the Plain (6:27–36), where Jesus exhorts his followers to new “rules of engagement” for their life in the world.

These rules of engagement come in a staccato series of imperatives (love, do good, bless, pray), offered to “those who listen” (Luke 6:27–28). This probably means these imperatives are for the disciples rather than the larger crowd, given the pairing of “listen and *do*” in the sermon’s closing parable (6:47). Jesus expects the imperatives to be put into practice by those who have made the decision to follow him. The commands are not startling advice for a religious teacher to give, but the recommended *objects* of those actions shatter the regnant system of reciprocity-governed ethics. Jesus does not call for his followers to love, do good, pray for, and bless those who will offer them the same coin; rather, he calls them to extend these kingdom actions to the very persons who will offer them offense, dishonor, and material loss in return.⁸ Reciprocity, which characterizes the ethic of “sinners” (οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, 3×, 6:33–34), is not an appropriate ethical paradigm for Jesus’ followers. To do no more than what reciprocity demands is to be without credit or credibility (6:32–34);⁹ the bar for “children of the Most High” (6:35) is much higher. Between the reciprocity-shattering imperatives (6:27–28) and the rationale for abandoning reciprocity (6:32–36), there is a dominical logion that links them and summarizes their underlying ethical norm: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (6:31).¹⁰ The “others” are undifferentiated by kinship rules or social paradigms; in a

8 See the similar description of kingdom ethics in the banquet parables, Luke 14:7–24, Chapter 3.

9 Literally, “What kind of grace (χάρις) is there to you” if you operate out of reciprocity?

10 Lev 19:18, the OT background to the Golden Rule, is usually expressed negatively: “Whatever you don’t want others to do to you, don’t do to your neighbor.” The prevailing reciprocity principle would have said: “Do unto others as they can do (or have done) to you.” See Tannehill, *Luke*, 118, and Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethic*, 112–14.

radical reversal of cultural norms, good is to be extended simply to “persons.”¹¹ This kind of living is based not on expectation of gain but on the character of the heavenly King, who is kind (χρηστός) and merciful (οἰκτιρῶν) even to the ungrateful and the wicked (6:35–36).

There is an unmistakable economic aspect to this new ethical paradigm. The cluster of imperatives clearly links “being children of the Most High” (Luke 6:35) to actions related to wealth and possessions: “do not withhold” (μὴ κωλύσης, 6:29), “give” to everyone who asks of you (δίδου, 6:30),¹² “don’t reclaim” (μὴ ἀπαίτει, 6:30), and “lend” (δανίστητε, 6:34, 35). A disciple’s ability to love and do good is bound up with the attitude toward his or her “stuff” (τὰ σὰ, 6:30). Clinging to material goods or using them to gain honor are unworthy behaviors for Jesus’ disciples; open-handed, extravagant generosity that mirrors the kindness and mercy of the King is to characterize the disciple’s attitude toward material wealth.

A clear picture is emerging of Luke’s pervasive interest in how following Jesus will have significant impact on one’s economic behaviors and attitudes toward possessions. Even in passages where that motif is not the central focus, it continues to underlie much of the action and parenesis in the Gospel.

1.3 *The Healing of the Centurion’s Servant and the Raising of the Widow’s Son, Luke 7:1–17*

Immediately after Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain, Luke presents a series of vignettes that serves as an insistent reminder to the reader about the kind of ministry Jesus is carrying out, offering proof in deed of the word just spoken (Luke 7). In this way, the episodes in Luke 7 function for the Sermon on the Plain in the same way that the Capernaum vignettes (4:32–44) did for the Nazareth sermon (4:18–31)—they illustrate in embodied form the content of the proclaimed word.¹³ The themes of reversal and right response permeate Luke 7,¹⁴ and the four episodes in the chapter (the healing of the centurion’s servant, the raising of the widow’s son, the response to John the Baptist, and the disrupted dinner in the Pharisee’s house) ring with echoes of the programmatic Nazareth sermon.¹⁵ The opening two pericopae of the chapter (7:1–10 and 7:11–17) illustrate reiteratively Jesus’ description of his messianic

11 A literal translation of 6:31: “And as you wish that persons (οἱ ἄνθρωποι) should do to you, do to them likewise.”

12 The hedge of reciprocity is removed from around the giving practices of Jesus’ followers.

13 See the discussion in Chapter 2.

14 Carroll, *Luke*, 158, calls Luke 7 a series of “inside-out reversals.”

15 Johnson, *Literary Function*, 96, asserts that Luke 7 is the chapter most closely aligned thematically with Luke 4.

ministry in Nazareth. The healing of a foreign commander's servant parallels the example Jesus gave in Nazareth of the healing of foreign General Naaman by Elisha (Luke 4:27; 2 Kings 5),¹⁶ while the raising of the poor widow's son in Nain both echoes and surpasses Elijah's miracle on behalf of the widow of Zarephath, Jesus' other illustration in the Nazareth message (Luke 4:26; 1 Kings 17:7–24).

The healing of a wealthy, foreign commander's servant (Luke 7:1–10),¹⁷ highlights how Jesus upends the traditional Jewish understanding of the boundaries of acceptance, specifically the definition of who is “worthy” to receive divine beneficence. It seems to me that Luke accomplishes this picture of reversal through four characterizations of the centurion (by the narrator, by the Jewish elders, by the man himself, and by Jesus), arranged in a kind of *inclusio*. The traditional understanding of “worthiness” is expressed in the inner elements, which are framed by the narrator's and Jesus' perspectives:

A: Characterization by the narrator (7:2–3). Luke's narrator offers the reader two key pieces of information about this foreign commander's character and spiritual orientation. First, the soldier highly values his sick slave (ἡν αὐτῷ ἔντιμος, 7:2), indicating that he perhaps already embodies the kind of attitude toward the marginalized that the Lukan Jesus has been emphasizing. Second, he acts with faith that Jesus can heal the sick (7:3). Although the words “faith” (πίστις) and “believe” (πιστεύειν) do not appear in the narrator's commentary, Jesus himself recognizes that the centurion's words and actions demonstrate an astonishing faith (7:9).

B: Characterization by the Jewish elders (7:3–5). The centurion's special envoys to Jesus beg him earnestly on the man's behalf.¹⁸ Their characterization of the commander is that he is “worthy” (ἄξιος) of Jesus' intervention—not because of his character, but because of his beneficence toward the Jewish people (7:5).¹⁹ In their estimation, he has acquired worthiness because of his positive orientation toward God's

16 For a list of the parallels between the healing of Naaman and the healing of this centurion's servant, see D. A. S. Ravens, “The Setting of Luke's Account of the Anointing: Luke 7:2–8:3,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 282–92 (287).

17 On the relative wealth of Roman centurions and their reputation as benefactors, see Edwards, *The Gospel*, 210.

18 Their earnest pleading may indicate the underlying presumption that Jesus' first response would be to ignore a request from an unworthy Gentile. See Garland, *Luke*, 295.

19 Note the parallels in the presentation of this centurion and that of Cornelius in Acts 10.

people;²⁰ on his own, as a Gentile, he would have been “unworthy,” outside the boundaries of those who could expect to be recipients of divine grace. This sets the centurion, despite his material resources, squarely within the socio-cultural group of “the poor,” as Luke conceives it.

B¹: *Characterization by the man himself* (7:6–8). Through a second set of envoys, the centurion tells Jesus not to go to the trouble of coming to him, and he describes himself twice as “unworthy” of a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.²¹ His humility is rooted in a recognition of Jesus’ authority (a right response),²² but also in the keen insight that Jesus, like a centurion, acts under a higher authority, presumably God’s. At this juncture of the Gospel, that is a radically correct insight into Jesus’ identity, which Jesus characterizes as “faith” (7:9).

A¹: *Characterization by Jesus* (7:9–10). Jesus’ reversal of the traditionally-understood boundaries of grace actually begins before he ever speaks, with his wordless decision to accompany the centurion’s envoys (7:6). Stepping into a Gentile home is not a boundary Jesus fears crossing. When Jesus does speak, after being met by the second set of emissaries, it is with amazement:²³ “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (7:9). Jesus’ estimation of the centurion—the final, authoritative word on his “worthiness” in this pericope—is an astonished recognition of the quality and depth of his faith.

The structure of this pericope highlights the traditional Jewish expectation about who is “worthy” to receive divine favor, an expectation targeted for reversal. A wealthy man who is yet “poor” because of his foreignness, a man of authority who nevertheless humbles himself before Jesus’ authority, a man whose faith excites astonishment in Jesus—*this* is “the worthy one” in Luke’s story.

20 Green, *The Gospel*, 287, notes that the Jewish envoys frame their request to Jesus with the language and assumptions of “the insider-outsider categories of honor and obligation prevalent throughout the Empire.”

21 Οὐ ἱκανός εἰμι, 7:6; οὐδὲ ἐμαυτὸν ἠξίωσα, 7:7.

22 Robert Gagnon suggests that Luke’s emphasis on the man’s humility may have been intended “at least in part for wealthy members of his community who, by virtue of functioning as patrons and benefactors of the community, might expect special honor and status from that community,” in “Luke’s Motives for Redaction in the Account of the Double Delegation in Luke 7:1–10,” *NovT* 36 (1994): 122–45 (143).

23 Although θαυμάζειν is common in Luke as a response to Jesus, it is only here that Jesus is the subject of the verb (as in the parallel text in Matt 8:10). See Edwards, *The Gospel*, 212.

The raising of the poor widow's son in Nain (Luke 7:11–17) forms the other half of this pair of stories. The centurion episode has a Synoptic parallel (Matt 8:5–13), but the female half of this doublet is unique to Luke.²⁴ In my opinion, it suits his narrative purposes to place it here: it forms a male-female pairing;²⁵ it illustrates the program of both the Nazareth sermon and the Sermon on the Plain, particularly the beatitudes; and it places a resuscitation account directly before Jesus' declaration to the Baptist's disciples that "the dead are being raised" (7:22).

The unnamed, grieving widow stands on the brink of marginality in a more obvious way than did the centurion. With his characteristic sensitivity to pathos,²⁶ Luke sets the spotlight squarely on the woman and her bitter situation, describing the body on the bier as "the dead only son of his mother—and she was a widow" (7:12, my translation).²⁷ She faces a doubly precarious future—the previous loss of her providing husband followed now by the loss of her only remaining male protector and provider.²⁸ Jesus' restoration of her son reverses not only her immediate burden of death and grief, but also the looming specter of economic privation and social marginalization.²⁹ Jesus' deed of compassion is an active expression of "good news proclaimed to the poor" (4:18).

Together, the two healing stories keep the reader's attention firmly fixed on Jesus' mission as described in Nazareth and on the parallel mission of disciples as outlined in the Sermon on the Plain. Both protagonists experience the εὐαγγέλιον of reversal, the centurion because of his extraordinary faith in Jesus (right response) and the woman because of Jesus' compassionate mission of good news to the poor. The centurion's social poverty is overturned; the widow's very real economic need is reversed.

24 On the pattern of "widow-officer complementarity" in Luke-Acts, see Tom Brodie, "Not Q but Elijah: The Saving of a Centurion's Servant (Luke 7:1–10) as an Internalization of the Saving of the Widow and Her Son (1 Kings 17:1–17)," *IBS* 14 (1992): 54–72 (60).

25 On Luke's proclivity toward "doubling," particularly the use of male-female pairs of stories, see Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 1132–36, and Robert Morgenthaler, *Die lukanische Geschichtsschreibung als Zeugnis*, 2 vol. (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1949), 1:104–105.

26 For a full treatment of Luke's sensitivity to both pathos and suspense in his story-telling, see Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 236–38.

27 For the peculiar bitterness of mourning an only son, see, e.g., Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech. 12:10. Spencer notes that the "two incidents where Luke's Jesus raises someone from the dead both involve restoring women's capacities for full lives (7:11–17; 8:40–42, 49–56)." F. Scott Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 4.

28 López Rodríguez, *Liberating Mission*, 61, calls her situation "material orphanhood."

29 Reid, *Choosing*, 104, notes that "not only the son, but his mother as well, is restored to life in the community."

1.4 *The Woman of Faith at Simon's House, Luke 7:36–50*

The paired stories of healing and resuscitation (Luke 7:1–17) are followed by John the Baptist's question about Jesus' messianic identity and Jesus' response (7:18–23).³⁰ The dominical answer is an explicit reiteration of the programmatic description of Jesus' ministry in the introduction (Luke 4:18–19), calling the reader to awareness of the persistent Lukan links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. Jesus' response to John is followed by a lengthy discourse to the crowds about John and Jesus (7:24–35), echoing the contrasts established in the infancy narratives and criticizing "this generation's" response to both men (7:31–35).

The heart of "this generation's" criticism of Jesus is his choice of table companions: "tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34). The very next story in the Gospel is of Jesus at a dinner (7:36–50), an episode replete with notes of irony, reversal, and right response.³¹ Jesus receives an invitation to dine with a Pharisee (7:36), presumably one who has been part of the listening, observing crowd. This dinner with the righteous person and his guests is interrupted by the disturbing presence of a woman, characterized by both the narrator (7:37) and the host (7:39) as "a sinner."³² She makes a silent but very public demonstration of love and loyalty to Jesus. His interaction with both the Pharisee and the woman keeps the theme of reversal and right response directly in front of the reader, with the motif of wealth and possessions never far below the surface.

The Pharisee remains nameless at the outset of the narrative and the woman remains nameless throughout, leading the reader to see them as representative of their groups. The former stands for all the persons of social and religious prestige who have demonstrated a mixed or negative response to Jesus thus far in Luke's Gospel;³³ while the woman represents the entire cast of the poor who have received good news.³⁴ The Pharisee demonstrates ambiguity in his

³⁰ See Chapter 3.

³¹ See the discussion of irony in Luke 7:36–50 in Neale, *Sinners*, 141–42.

³² There is no consensus among commentators about whether Luke is here describing the same event as the one recorded in Matt 26:6–13/Mark 14:3–9/John 12:1–8. Schottroff's argument seems most reasonable: "Although Luke 7:36–50 is related to the narratives of the anointing in Bethany in a tradition-historical sense, it is, in relation to these narratives, an independent story." Luise Schottroff, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament*, trans. Annemarie S. Kidder (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 139.

³³ Mixed or negative responses to Jesus thus far in the narrative: the Nazarenes (4:28–29); the Pharisees (5:30; 6:2, 7, 11); "the people of this generation" (7:31–35).

³⁴ The "poor who have received good news" thus far in the narrative: Mary (1:34–38, 46–55); the shepherds (2:15–17); Simeon (2:25–32); Anna (2:36–38); Simon, James, and John (5:11); the leper (5:12); the paralytica and his friends (5:17–20); Levi (5:28, 29); the Twelve (6:13); the centurion (7:11–10); the poor widow (7:11–17).

attitude toward Jesus. He invites him to dinner, an action that is positive on the surface, although Luke gives no hint about his motives (7:36). Yet the host's inner dialogue reveals deep skepticism about Jesus' identity: "Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner'" (7:39). It appears that the host was initially willing to concede a prophetic identity to Jesus, but now, given Jesus' scandalous lack of insight into the woman's character and reputation, the Pharisee doubts even that possibility. The doubt is expressed forcefully (εἰ + the past tense) and "this man" (οὗτος) can have a pejorative edge.³⁵ There is a sense that while the Pharisee is purposefully holding back from drawing any final conclusion about Jesus, he is leaning towards an ultimately negative response. Thus, his hospitality to Jesus is reserved at best, perhaps even reluctant. The woman, on the other hand, weeps, washes Jesus' feet, then dries, kisses, and anoints them, all in a silence pregnant with extravagant love, gratitude, and hospitality, as observed by both the narrator (7:38) and Jesus (7:44–46). The alabaster jar of ointment she uses in this act is of great worth,³⁶ making her lavish "hospitality" to Jesus stand in stark contrast to the Pharisee's.

The parable that Jesus tells within the context of this double encounter (Luke 7:41, 42) comes as a response both to the Pharisee's doubt about Jesus' prophetic identity and to his cautious reserve as host to Jesus, indicated by his failure to perform the gestures of hospitality that are offered to Jesus by the woman.³⁷ As Jesus responds to his host's unvoiced criticism and tepid welcome, he now addresses the man by name.³⁸ "Simon," he says, "I have something to say to you" (7:40). Simon's polite response, "Teacher, speak," rings with hints of delicate irony, since Simon's actions and thoughts to this point indicate his lack of readiness to hear. Jesus proceeds to tell a parable about two debtors whose burden of repayment was cancelled—and his point is that *both* were debtors. Jesus' question to Simon at the end of the parable is not which debtor will love the gracious creditor, but "which of them will love him *more*"

35 An English equivalent might be "this guy" or "this fellow," said with a tone of scorn or disbelief; the Spanish demonstrative *éste* closely parallels the Greek usage. The same response, with a clearly pejorative sense to οὗτος, is made by the guests in 7:49. See also Luke 23:2.

36 On the value of this perfume and its container, see Garland, *Luke* 1:696, and Bovon, *Luke* 1:294.

37 The woman's actions were not *required* of a host, but neither were they extraordinary in cases where great respect was shown by a host toward his guest. See Bock, *Luke* 1:701.

38 With the naming, Simon is transformed from a generic group representative, to a specified individual who must choose his response to Jesus. With Tannehill, *The Shape*, 267, and J. Patrick Mullen, *Dining with Pharisees* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004), 118.

(7:42, emphasis added). Simon, pushed into a corner by the obvious nature of the expected response,³⁹ answers reluctantly: “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt” (7:43a).⁴⁰ Jesus confirms Simon’s unenthusiastic response: “You have judged rightly” (7:43b), then he turns to the woman (7:44a). For the remainder of the pericope, Jesus’ physical orientation is toward the woman, even when he is addressing Simon. “Do you see this woman?” Jesus asks (7:44b),⁴¹ pushing Simon to look beyond his dismissive categorization of her as “a sinner.” Jesus wants Simon to really *see* her as a fellow human being and as a model of what an appropriate response to Jesus looks like: extravagant gratitude and love, including the generous disposition of material resources. Jesus’ words to the woman acknowledge that the intersection of God’s mercy and her right response have resulted in a radical reversal of her reality: no longer a sinner, she is now saved.⁴² For Simon, the woman’s status reversal signifies a turning upside down of his understanding of boundaries and status markers, of sin and grace.⁴³

Reversal—of the categories of exclusion-inclusion—is on center stage in this story. But woven into the details is Luke’s persistent interest in the economic aspects of right response to God’s work of reversal, seen here as generous hospitality and free disposition of wealth, the proper response of gratitude to Jesus.

1.5 *The Feeding of the 5,000, Luke 9:10–17 (Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; John 6:1–15)*

Near the end of the long Galilean unit (Luke 5:1–9:50), Luke inserts his version of the feeding of the 5,000, a narrative replete with notes of reversal. First,

39 In the parable’s almost coercive persuasion, it is similar to Nathan’s story in 2 Samuel 12. Bovon, *Luke* 1:295. Jesus uses a similar technique in Luke 10:36; see Section 2.11 below.

40 Bovon, *Luke* 1:291, notes: “The teacher, now become a student, must give the single correct answer almost against his will.” For those who see thoughtful consideration rather than reluctance in Simon’s answer, see Bock, *Luke* 1:700, and Edwards, *The Gospel*, 229.

41 “At this point Luke uses a mechanism frequent in the parables addressed against the enemies of the good news. He first makes his speakers look at the poor and sinful, and immediately invites them to look at themselves.” Tereza Cavalcanti, “Jesus, the Penitent Woman, and the Pharisee,” *JHLT* 2 (1994): 28–40 (33).

42 For discussions of the woman’s prior forgiveness in an un-narrated encounter, see Fitzmyer, *Luke* 1:683–94 and John J. Kilgallen, “John the Baptist, the Sinful Woman, and the Pharisee,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 675–79 (676–77).

43 See Ellen Juhl Christiansen, “Sinner According to Words of the Law, Righteous by Works of Love: Boundary Challenges in Relation to the Woman Who Anoints Jesus (Luke 7:36–50),” in *Jesus and Paul: Global Perspectives in Honor of James D. G. Dunn for His 70th Birthday*, ed. B. J. Oropeza, C. K. Robertson, and Douglas C. Mohrmann (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 35–45 (38–39).

there is Jesus' response to the crowds who have interrupted his private debriefing with the Twelve (9:10–11). Matthew and Mark both record that the crowd's presence provoked compassion in Jesus (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτοῖς, Matt 14:14/Mark 6:34); Luke, however, says that Jesus "welcomed" them (ἀποδεξάμενος αὐτοὺς, 9:11). This is the friendly, hospitable reaction of a host to his guests,⁴⁴ and it stands in contrast to the response of the Twelve, who see the crowd as "other than" their own circle of hospitality and thus can request Jesus to send them away (9:12).⁴⁵ For Jesus, the crowd, in all its neediness, is not a nuisance but a welcome friend.⁴⁶ Second, there is a reversal of the disciples' understanding of how the crowd's needs will be met. They are completely pragmatic and fully fixated on "self-help" solutions—the crowd must provide for itself out of its own resources.⁴⁷ There is not even a hint of expectation that Jesus can or should take care of the situation, and they are caught off guard when he hands over to *them* the responsibility of hosting ("you give them something to eat," 9:13). Finally, there is a movement in the narrative from scarcity ("we have no more than," 9:13) to abundance: "And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces" (9:17).⁴⁸ The "leftovers" are literally "what abounded to them" (τὸ περισσεύσαν αὐτοῖς). "To abound" (περισεύω) appears four times in Luke's Gospel, each time indicating superfluity of goods and resources. In the other three instances (rich fool, 12:15; prodigal son, 15:17; ungenerous rich persons, 21:4), humans are either grasping or longing for abundance, clutching it for themselves. Here, in its first occurrence in the Gospel, Jesus illustrates how abundance works in the kingdom; it is linked inseparably to hospitality lavished generously on others.

While the theme of reversal predominates in this pericope, economic undertones are once again clearly present. As we have seen throughout Luke's Gospel, when kingdom reversal is present, part of a right response to that work of God is generous hospitality and boundary-less table fellowship.

44 For other uses in Luke of (ἀπο-, ὑπο-) δέχομαι as hospitable welcome, see 10:8, 38; 19:6. When used with οὐκ or μή, the verb represents the lack of such welcome, e.g., 9:53; 10:10.

45 Their failure to extend hospitality is ironic, given their very recent experience of receiving hospitality during their missionary exercise. See John P. Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 58.

46 As Carroll, *Luke*, 208, observes, this meal discloses "the boundary-shattering human face of the community created at table, even if the table amounts to rocks and grass in a field."

47 "Send the crowd away, so that *they* may go ... and get provisions" (9:12, emphasis added). Cf. also Matt 14:15/Mark 6:36.

48 As Tannehill, *Luke*, 156, notes: "Except for a privileged few, scarcity was a fundamental reality. The feeding of the 5,000, however, proclaims abundance. The communities of Jesus are encouraged to hope that the messianic kingdom will bring an abundance in which all can share."

1.6 *What It Means to Follow Jesus, Luke 9:57–62 (Matt 8:18–22)*

As Luke's large central section opens (Luke 9:51–19:27, the "travel narrative"), the challenge of discipleship is in view. Persons who have made an initial right response to Jesus, even "leaving all to follow him" (5:11), are now confronted with the reality that ongoing discipleship will challenge "business as usual" at all levels of life. In fact, Jesus has summarized his teaching about discipleship as a denial of self and daily taking up of one's cross (9:23). In the first pericope of the travel narrative (9:51–56), two of Jesus' closest disciples have faced the dominical reversal of their "normal and natural" human response to an insult offered by the Samaritans. In the second episode (9:57–62), Jesus overturns the socially and culturally acceptable priorities of three would-be followers.

Luke offers a triad of staccato dialogues between Jesus and potential disciples (Luke 9:57–62), in which Jesus reverses the acceptable sources of security and identity for disciples.⁴⁹ His followers will find these things neither in possessions and property (9:58) nor in faithful compliance with filial and religious obligations (9:60, 62). The urgency and priority of the kingdom of God trump all other behavior-shaping forces. The three short dialogues are arranged in a chiasm:

A—"I will follow" (human initiative, 9:47)

B—"Follow me" (dominical imperative, 9:59)

A¹—"I will follow" (human initiative, 9:61)

The central element holds the interpretive force, rooting the call to discipleship in the dominical imperative (9:59a). That command crashes up against an apparently unassailable motive for delay, a motive that complies with one of the most sacred values of the ancient world: proper, honorable burial (9:59b).⁵⁰ Jesus' shocking and hyperbolic refusal to allow a delay for this most legitimate reason ("let the dead bury their own dead," 9:60a) makes clear that human priorities are reversed when the kingdom of God comes near.⁵¹ It is

49 Tannehill suggests that this pericope may be directed specifically to "men and women attracted by security, status, and power." Tannehill, "Attitudinal Shifts in Synoptic Pronouncement Stories," in *Orientation by Disorientation: Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literary Criticism*, ed. Richard A. Spencer (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1980), 183–97 (186).

50 See Sirach 38:16–23. Edwards, *The Gospel*, 300, notes that "'Do not neglect burial' ... was for all ancients, Jews and Greeks, a virtually inviolable duty."

51 See the detailed discussion in Byron McCane, "'Let the Dead Bury Their Own Dead': Secondary Burial and Matthew 8:21–22," *HTR* 83 (1990): 31–43. McCane goes to great

obvious that Jesus is asking of these potential disciples the kind of response given by Simon, James and John (5:11), and Levi (5:28): leave everything and follow him. Consistent with the portrait of discipleship discerned throughout the first nine chapters of Luke's Gospel, the "leaving" required of disciples includes the abandonment of material security—in this case, to follow Jesus into homelessness (9:58).

1.7 *A Lawyer's Question and a Parable about Neighbors, Luke 10:25–37*

At this stage in a narrative reading of the Third Gospel, the reader has encountered four pericopae that build explicitly upon the foundation laid in the introduction, making direct connections between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions: disciples who leave all (Luke 5:1–11); dominical blessings on "the poor" and parallel woes on "the rich," with an eschatological reversal of status for both (6:20–26); a dominical reiteration of mission, summarized as "good news preached to the poor" (7:18–23); and a report of women disciples, whose right response to Jesus includes the generous use of their material resources (8:1–3).⁵² The reader who has followed Luke's narrative thus far has also been confronted with seven other texts that demonstrate indirect links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions.⁵³ Thus, Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan finds the reader alert for ongoing signs of this emphasis that has permeated the Gospel to this point.

The setting of the Good Samaritan parable is a challenge and riposte between Jesus and a lawyer.⁵⁴ Although that setting has Synoptic parallels,⁵⁵ the story itself is uniquely Lukan. Even in the series of questions and answers between the lawyer and Jesus, Luke differs from Matthew and Mark in a significant way. Rather than having Jesus answer the man's question ("Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?", Luke 10:25), Luke sharpens the interchange

lengths to demonstrate that the first-century custom of "secondary burial" stands behind Jesus' imperious injunction to "let the dead bury their own dead." His preference for this ingenious reading is that it makes Jesus' words less shocking and counter-cultural. However, shock value seems to be precisely what Jesus was after here! And the startling sharpness of Jesus' words is present with or without the secondary burial explanation.

52 See Chapter 3.

53 Luke 5:12–16; 6:27–36; 7:1–10, 11–17, 36–50; 9:10–17, 57–62 (see the preceding sections of this chapter).

54 "In Luke, lawyers play the role of those whose interpretation and practice of the Law are at odds with Jesus." Joshua M. Strahan, "Jesus Teaches Theological Interpretation of the Law: Reading the Good Samaritan in Its Literary Context," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10 (2016): 71–86 (76).

55 Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34.

by having Jesus turn the question back upon the interrogator: “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” (10:26).⁵⁶ This forces the lawyer to provide the answer. The man is uncomfortable with his own response (love God, love neighbor), since Jesus then forces him to consider its implications: “Do this (τοῦτο ποίει), and you will live” (10:28). By asking Jesus to specify “who is my neighbor,” the lawyer attempts to justify himself⁵⁷—probably hoping that Jesus’ definition will be as narrow as his own, thereby relieving him of the onerous obligation to love outsiders. What he really wants to know is, “Who is *not* my neighbor?”⁵⁸ This provides Luke the opportunity to return once again to the theme of reversal, particularly how God’s work in Jesus reverses expectations about insider-outsider categories.

Luke has Jesus tell a story, which at first seems to be in answer to the man’s second question but turns out, in fact, to be a startling response to the initial query: “What must I do?” (Luke 10:25). The narrative frame around the parable is anchored in a fourfold use of “do” (ποιέω), twice on the lips of the lawyer, twice in imperatives from Jesus.⁵⁹ The characters in the parable will illustrate both a non-doing (the priest and Levite, whose inaction is summarized as “passing by on the other side”) and a faithful doing (the compassionate actions of the Samaritan).⁶⁰

The parable opens with the typical Lukan phrase “a certain man” (ἄνθρωπος τις) and unfolds in a conventional form: a series of three travelers encounter a person in need, the victim of a robbery and a brutal beating. The first two travelers, a priest⁶¹ and a Levite, are members of the religious elite. Their failure to “love their neighbor as themselves” probably prompts Jesus’ listeners to expect a comic denouement: the third traveler will be a common, ordinary Israelite, who will step in to save the day and model proper, Torah-guided

56 “In a culture where questions challenge, Jesus’ response of a question to a question establishes his honor.” Pamela Thimmes, “The Language of Community: Metaphors, Systems of Convictions, Ethnic, and Gender Issues in Luke 10:25–37 and 10:38–42,” in *SBLSP* 1991, ed. Eugene H. Lovering (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991): 698–713 (706).

57 Luke will continue to build a negative picture of those who “justify themselves”; see 16:15 and 18:9.

58 “By asking Jesus to clarify the limits of his neighbor, he implies that there can be a non-neighbor.” Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition*, 129.

59 “What shall I do?” (10:25), “do this” (10:27), “the one who did mercy” (10:37), “do likewise” (10:37).

60 “The priest and the Levite represent those whose reading of the Law does not prioritize compassion, action, or solidarity with the suffering.” Strahan, “Theological Interpretation,” 76.

61 “A certain priest” (ἱερεὺς τις) parallels “a certain man,” making an ironic link between the unresponsive religious official and the needy traveler.

response.⁶² But the story takes an unexpected turn: the hero who models “love your neighbor as yourself” turns out to be a Samaritan.

The economic undertones of this reversal story are heard in the unexpected hero’s extraordinary personal and financial investment in the care of the wounded man. After giving him immediate aid and overnight respite (Luke 10:34), “the next day he took out *two denarii*, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will *repay* you whatever you *spend*’” (10:35, emphasis added). With that startling image lingering in everyone’s mind, Jesus closes the story by once again probing his questioner, this time with an interrogative that admits of only one response: “Who is the neighbor?”⁶³ The neighbor, answers the lawyer, is “the one who showed the needy man mercy” (10:37a). The final imperative, “go and do likewise,” sums up the whole discussion. Rather than defining the parameters of the “neighbor” (understood as an object of mercy), and thereby confirming the insider-outsider categories desired by the lawyer, Jesus charges him to *be* a neighbor, with no restrictions on the object of his neighborliness.⁶⁴ Inheriting eternal life is rooted in love for God and love for neighbor, love that is expressed in active compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, 10:33) towards those in need.⁶⁵ Thus far in Luke’s narrative, σπλαγχνίζομαι has had only Jesus as subject (7:13);⁶⁶ in this story, the Samaritan acts like Jesus. It is this compassion—Jesus-like and Torah-fulfilling—that seeks to reverse and realign the lawyer’s (and the reader’s) view of whom and how to love and that provides the normative parenthesis for Luke’s reader.

1.8 *A Loving Father and His Two Sons, Luke 15:11–32*

Moving on from the parable of the Good Samaritan, which maintains Luke’s consistent linking of the themes of reversal and right response with the motif of wealth and possessions, the reader traverses a long section of dominical teachings and controversies (Luke 11–13). Luke’s interest in wealth and

62 “Priests, Levites, and people” is a short-hand phrase for “all Israel.” See Edwards, *The Gospel*, 321, and Nolland, *Luke* 2:594.

63 Jesus used a similarly uncompromising interrogation technique with Simon the Pharisee in 7:42; see section 2.5 above.

64 As Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 394, notes: “The question of who is the neighbor will not be processed because it is theoretical and the questioner wants to escape the concrete fact. Instead he is given practical instruction: help the needy” (my translation).

65 “This parable illustrates how life-giving interpretation of Torah is characterized by compassion, action, and solidarity with the suffering.” Strahan, “Theological Interpretation,” 72.

66 The noun form, σπλαγχνία, paired with mercy (ἐλεος), appears in Luke 1:78 with God as the subject.

possessions as an aspect of discipleship is explicitly present in that unit in the parable of the rich fool (12:13–21) and in two of the three blunt renunciation imperatives in the Gospel (12:33; 14:33).⁶⁷ As the narrative progresses, the next large unit (Luke 14–16) also weaves together various threads of this Lukan interest: table fellowship and hospitality, with their insider-outsider dynamics; the use of material goods; the cost and nature of true discipleship; and the values of the kingdom, which invert many cherished values of human society. The other unifying thread in the section is the constant presence of the Pharisees, sometimes at center stage, sometimes in the background. They stand not only as opponents of Jesus himself but as foils for the Lukan portrait of right response to Jesus' ministry and message.

In the center of that unit on reversal and right response, Luke places the three parables of "lost things" (Luke 15),⁶⁸ which are set in the context of a stark dichotomy of responses to Jesus' teaching. "All the tax collectors and sinners" approach Jesus in order to hear (ἀκούειν) him (15:1), but the Pharisees and scribes, Luke says, were grumbling (διεγόγγυζον, 15:2). The specific nature of the Pharisees' complaint ("he welcomes sinners and eats with them") suggests that these differing responses take place in the context of another meal. The tax collectors and sinners, Jesus' table companions, model the response previously called for by Jesus: "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκούετω, 14:35b). The negative response of the scribes and Pharisees is once again linked to disdain for Jesus' choice of dinner companions, indicating that they have not heard either the message of the banquet parables (Luke 14) or Jesus' imperative about listening. They are deeply dissatisfied with and unpersuaded by Jesus' redefinition of insider-outsider categories.

In response, Jesus tells three parables about "lost things"—a sheep (Luke 15:4), a coin (15:8), and two lost sons (15:11).⁶⁹ The series of stories focuses primarily on God's response to lost-ness and secondarily on the appropriate human response to the offer of divine grace. The first two brief parables establish Jesus' fundamental point: God delights in finding the lost and invites his "friends and neighbors" to rejoice with him (15:3, 6, 9). In the parlance of the parables, "being found by God" is synonymous with the repentance of a sinner (15:7, 10). The final parable broadens to present a third figure, an apparently non-lost person (the elder brother) who does not embrace the finder's

67 See Chapter 3.

68 The parables in Luke 15 continue the theme of "good news to the outcasts" from chap 14 and anticipate chap 16, where, as Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 158, notes, "the use of material goods becomes metaphoric of deeper realities."

69 Forms of ἀπόλλυμι appear 8× in the chapter (Luke 15:4[×2], 6, 8, 9, 17, 24, 32).

joy over the return of the lost (younger brother). In reality, both sons are lost, by their own willful choice.⁷⁰ They each choose to be outsiders, in terms of relationship to the father, one by his dishonoring treatment of the father,⁷¹ the other by his refusal to share the father's joy. In the younger son's case, his choice of outsider status is reversed when he "comes to his senses" (15:17) and returns home. The father's assessment of this reversal is expressed twice: "this son of mine who was dead is alive again; he was lost and is found!" (15:24, 32). The older son becomes an outsider by deliberately choosing a perspective that runs contrary to his father's view of the forgiven younger brother. Like the Pharisees, he considers himself a righteous insider, assured of privileged status with the father through a somewhat grudging loyalty (15:29);⁷² but by failing to share in the father's joy over the lost-become-found, he reveals that he is as much an outsider as his brother was. As Johnson puts it, "He is alienated even though he never left home!"⁷³ It is this contrast between the two perspectives—the father's and the elder brother's—that stands at the heart of the central question in the parable: how will Jesus' listeners respond to "tax collectors and sinners"?⁷⁴ Luke leaves the reader in uncertainty about whether this second son will also choose to become an insider by adopting the father's perspective, but the last word in the parable belongs to the father, who pleads passionately and tenderly with this beloved son (τέκνον) to enter and celebrate.

Though none of the parables in Luke 15 is directly focused on wealth and possessions, the right use of material possessions is an underlying factor in the third parable. As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the players within this story demonstrate their character and their response to grace through their actions in relationship to material wealth. The younger son demonstrates his distance from the father by "wasteful," selfish use of material resources. The older son is equally distant from the father, as seen by his desire to clutch the father's resources closely inside a narrow circle ("with my friends," 15:29) that implicitly excludes both the father and the lost brother. The father stands at the center of the story, as the exemplar.⁷⁵ He uses wealth with a lavish generosity that

70 There are echoes here of Jesus' brief parable told at Simon's dinner table (Luke 7:41–42). There the characters are two debtors; here, two sons, both of whom need and are offered the father's grace. See Edwards, *The Gospel*, 446.

71 On the dishonoring nature of the son's request for his inheritance while the father was still living, see Garland, *Luke*, 624, and York, *The Last*, 149.

72 See Carroll, *Luke*, 318.

73 Johnson, *Luke*, 238.

74 See Tannehill, *Luke*, 239–40.

75 Contra Metzger, *Consumption*, 84–107, who views the father's characterization as ambivalent at best, perhaps as foolish and incompetent.

celebrates the return of one lost son (15:22–24) and provides continual abundance for the other (15:31).

Luke continues, both explicitly and indirectly, to construct a portrait of discipleship that is inseparable from one's economic choices. Disciples are called to imitate the conduct modeled by the father in the parable of the lost sons: extravagant generosity and boundary-less table fellowship that overturn insider-outsider categories.

1.9 *The Pharisee and the Publican, Luke 18:9–14*

Following the parable of the lost sons (Luke 15:11–32), the large unit on reversal and right response (Luke 14–16) concludes with two parables that explicitly link those themes with the motif of wealth and possessions (16:1–13, 19–31).⁷⁶ In a narrative reading, the next pericope to make that connection, albeit in a more implicit manner, is another uniquely Lukan parable: the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9–14).⁷⁷ This parable echoes with resonance from the parable of the lost sons (15:11–32): there is a Pharisee who behaves like the elder son and a tax collector who resembles the younger.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is a rather abrupt turn from Jesus' teaching to the disciples;⁷⁸ he suddenly addresses a group Luke characterizes as "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous (δίκαιοι) and regarded others with contempt" (Luke 18:9).⁷⁹ It seems to me that there are multiple reasons for reading this as a circumlocution for the Pharisees: they were Jesus' most recent interlocutors, other than disciples (17:20); they have been the recipients of Jesus' harshest criticism to this point in the narrative;⁸⁰ a Pharisee is given a starring role in the story; and both the Pharisees' self-righteous confidence and their contempt for others (especially tax collectors) are well-established by this point in Luke's narrative.⁸¹ Tax collectors, too, have a carefully developed role in Luke's Gospel: they are the right responders to the work of God in Jesus, the outsiders who become insiders through repentance.⁸²

⁷⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁷⁷ As Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 267–70, notes, it is possible to read between the lines that the widow in Luke 18:1–8 was most likely clamoring for *economic* justice from the judge, in which case the first parable in Luke 18 might also belong with the texts being analyzed in this section.

⁷⁸ "Them" (αὐτοῖς, 18:1) has as its antecedent noun "the disciples" (τοὺς μαθητάς, 17:22).

⁷⁹ ἐξουθενούντας τοὺς λοιποὺς; cf. also Luke 18:2.

⁸⁰ Luke 11:37–52; 12:1; 16:14–15.

⁸¹ The Pharisees' self-righteous confidence: 5:33; 6:2; 11:38, 39, 42, 43; 16:15; the Pharisees' contempt for others: 5:30; 7:39; 11:46; 15:1–2.

⁸² The right response of tax collectors begins in the introduction (3:12–13) and continues throughout the Gospel (5:27–29; 7:34; 15:1–2). See the excellent discussion in Carroll, *Luke*, 360.

So when the two characters are presented, the reader anticipates that their roles will be consistent within the parable and expects an element of status reversal to be part of the denouement. These expectations are fulfilled. Although they seem to start on a level playing field (both “went up to the temple to pray,” Luke 18:10), the Pharisee and the tax collector are quickly distinguished by their attitudes. Within the parable, the Pharisee’s self-congratulatory prayer reflects the narrator’s earlier categorization of Jesus’ interlocutors (18:11): “I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income” (i.e., he trusts in himself that he is righteous)⁸³ and “I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” (i.e., he regards others with contempt).⁸⁴ The Pharisee operates with a worldview that separates a small group of insiders from “others” (οἱ λοιποί, the rest of humanity); even his physical self-location in the temple (“standing by himself”) serves to set him apart. But in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus has been dismantling the notion of “otherness” as a rationale for separating oneself from neighbors and the needy. In contrast to the Pharisee, the tax collector, by his humble actions (standing far off, eyes down, beating his breast) and terse words (“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”), demonstrates that he has no confidence in his own merits, only in God’s mercy. In so doing, he aligns himself with the humble, the repentant, the lost, the excluded—the sinners that, in Luke’s narrative, God delights to rescue and among whom Jesus is forming a new community.⁸⁵

The expected reversal comes with Jesus’ solemn declaration (18:14a): “I tell you, this man (i.e., the sinner) went down to his home justified (δεδικαιωμένος) rather than the other (i.e., the self-proclaimed δίκαιος).”⁸⁶ There is a delicate irony here as the one who has scornfully separated himself from “others” is now dismissed by Jesus as “the other.” The summary aphorism that concludes

83 His fasting and tithing practices go above and beyond the requirements of Torah. See Johnson, *Luke*, 272; and Green, *The Gospel*, 647.

84 As Bock, *Luke* 2:1462, correctly notes, the “thanksgiving” prayer does not focus on God’s acts on his behalf but on his own assumed moral superiority.

85 Tannehill, *Luke*, 265, notes that this parable serves as part of Jesus’ defense of his association with “outsiders” like tax collectors.

86 Robert Doran argues for reading παρ’ ἐκεῖνον as a true comparative, rather than with exclusive force: “this one went down to his house *more* justified than the other.” “The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: An Agonistic Story,” *CBQ* 69 (2007): 259–70 (261–62). See also Florian Wilk, “(Selbst-) Erhöhung und (Selbst-)Erniedrigung in Lk 18,9–14,” *BN* 155 (2012): 113–29 (125–26). However, a reading like that of Doran and Wilk, in my opinion, ignores not only the immediate context of the parable, but also the whole Lukan landscape from 14:1–19:10. I agree with Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 585, that the comparative phrase here is superlatively exclusive (*Der Komparativ ist im Sinne des Lukas superlativisch-exklusiv zu verstehen*).

the dominical commentary on the parable echoes Jesus' previous words to status-grabbers (14:11) and extends the reach of the parable to all disciples: "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted" (18:14b).⁸⁷ The last word in the story rests in the divine passives: "will be humbled, will be exalted," augmented here by "is justified." God's assessment is what matters, and his values are a reversal of standard human values. The promise of eschatological divine reversal makes implicit demands upon present human behavior and attitudes, calling for a radical reorienting of the governing values of a disciple's life.

This story of reversal and right response intersects with the motif of wealth and possessions in an indirect way, at the level of what constitutes justifying behavior and attitudes. Within the Pharisee's self-evaluation is the matter of how he uses wealth. He compliments himself on tithing, but glaringly absent is any hint of being rich toward God or laying up treasures in heaven through almsgiving. His contempt for "sinners" narrows his understanding of community and blocks the possibility of "exercising mercy" (ἐλεῆμων) through "almsgiving" (ἐλεημοσύνη). The Pharisee in this parable models the exact opposite of the right response that Luke has been portraying throughout his narrative.⁸⁸

1.10 *Joseph of Arimathea and the Women from Galilee, Luke 23:50–56* (Matthew 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–47; John 19:38–42)

There is one final text to consider in the group of Lukan passages that make indirect connections between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. It is the final glimpse of disciples using their possessions in Jesus' service and draws together various threads from the accumulated portrait of discipleship that Luke has been painting in the Gospel. The brief paragraph between the crucifixion and resurrection accounts highlights Joseph of Arimathea and "the women who had come with him [Jesus] from Galilee" (Luke 23:50–56). Joseph is not explicitly characterized as wealthy, but his ownership of a new, rock-hewn tomb indicates some level of economic privilege.⁸⁹ Luke provides three positive pieces of information that lead the reader to understand Joseph to be either already a disciple or

87 "The aphorism goes beyond anything stated in the story with regard to the humbling of the Pharisee, and brings overtones of eschatological reversal to the parable." York, *The Last*, 74 (see also 77–80).

88 There is no word about how the repentant tax collector uses wealth in response to the justifying grace of God, but the scene is set for details about that very issue in the "real life" story of another tax collector (Luke 19:1–10; see Chapter 3).

89 Matthew 27:47 explicitly identifies Joseph as rich.

someone properly poised to become a disciple.⁹⁰ First, as to his character, he is “good and righteous” (ἀγαθὸς καὶ δίκαιος, 23:50).⁹¹ Second, his socio-religious location is given as “a member of the council” (23:50), therefore a person of influence. Third, like Simeon, the “righteous man” at the beginning of Luke’s story (2:25), so now at the end of the Gospel Joseph is “waiting expectantly” (προσεδέχετο) for the kingdom of God (23:51); both men demonstrate sensitive responsiveness to God’s work in Jesus.⁹² Joseph, the last rich man to appear in the Gospel, uses his resources to serve Jesus by providing a resting place for his body. The women who had followed Jesus from Galilee now follow Joseph to Jesus’ tomb (23:55).⁹³ These female disciples are most likely the same ones whom Luke highlighted earlier as part of Jesus’ Galilean ministry (8:1–3), and they do what they have been presumably been doing all along: they use their resources on Jesus’ behalf, this time investing in the burial spices and ointments for his body (23:56).

2 Summary

In Chapter 3, a narrative reading of thirteen Lukan texts that make explicit links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions revealed a cluster of five consistent and interrelated emphases within the Third Gospel. Chapter 4 has analyzed a second set of texts, eleven passages dealing with reversal and right response (discipleship) that make implicit or indirect connections to the motif of wealth and possessions. These passages were read with attention to how Luke’s careful composition and persistent interest in economic matters bring to the foreground elements that may be implicit or below the surface in this second set of texts. The same five Lukan emphases are found to be present in these passages as well, contributing to the cumulative Lukan portrait of discipleship as a life that corresponds to Jesus’ expressed mission of proclaiming good news to the poor and release to the captives.

90 Matthew 27:57 and John 19:38 describe Joseph as a secret disciple. For the view that Joseph is a pious Jew but not a disciple, see Tannehill, *Luke*, 105–106; Nolland, *Luke* 3:1164.

91 The only other persons characterized as ἀγαθός in Luke are Jesus (by the rich ruler, 18:18), God (by Jesus, 18:18), and the slave in the parable of the talents (by the master, 19:17). The only other persons called δίκαιος (by the narrator) in Luke’s Gospel are all in the introduction: Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Simeon.

92 See Nolland, *Luke* 3:1163.

93 Note Nolland’s interesting view that Luke has used the intensive κατακολουθήσεται here because “this is the very last piece of following possible for them.” Nolland, *Luke* 3:1166.

First, it was seen in Section One that *the essence of discipleship (i.e., right response to Jesus) is expressed as leaving and following*, and, second, that *leaving and following are the essential actions of all disciples, not just the Twelve*. In the analysis of Lukan texts of reversal and right response in which the motif of wealth and possessions is an implicit rather than explicit focus, the leaving-following nature of discipleship was seen most clearly in the dominical call to three would-be disciples (9:57–62). Those who would follow Jesus (whether part of the Twelve or not) are called to leave the security of regular income, family obligations, and honor-producing duties. First loyalty belongs exclusively to Jesus; all other loyalties must be left behind.

The third consistent Lukan emphasis identified in Chapter 3 is that *the values governing the behavior and attitudes of Jesus' disciples reflect the priorities of the eschatological kingdom and are a reversal of accepted human norms*. This emphasis continues unabated in the passages considered in this chapter. Specifically, the ethic of reciprocity is deemed unworthy of Jesus' followers. The circle of those to whom one does good (loves, blesses, and prays for) and to whom one offers hospitality is no longer bound by kinship or by the hope of gain. This emphasis was seen in the "rules of engagement" for disciples (6:27–36), in the miracles extended to a foreigner and a destitute widow (7:1–17), and in the feeding of the 5,000 (9:10–17). For Jesus and for his disciples, hospitality and table fellowship are without insider-outsider boundaries. In fact, the very categories of in-out, lost-found, and righteous-unrighteous, which function to divide persons according to the regnant human norms, are turned upside down by the kingdom.

The fourth emphasis identified in Chapter 3 is that *Luke's use of "poor" is polyvalent, but "rich" is applied consistently as an economic categorization*. Neither "poor" (πτωχός) nor "rich" (πλούσιος) is used to characterize persons in the passages examined in this chapter, but there are clusters of persons who fit both categories of "poor" (soteriological and literal). The "soteriologically poor" (those who depend on God and respond rightly to Jesus) are referenced twice: "you that listen" (6:27, in parallel with "you poor," i.e., disciples, in 6:20) and Jesus' followers, who, like Jesus himself, cannot count on material resources for security (9:58). The "literal poor" (those marginalized economically, socially, culturally, or religiously from full participation in the life of the community) are present as well: the leper (5:12–14); the centurion (7:1–10); the grieving widow (7:11–17); the sinful woman (7:36–50); the hungry multitude (9:10–17); and the tax collector (18:9–14). With the exception of the last one (a character in a parable), these are all real persons in real need who receive a compassionate response from Jesus that reverses their situation. Two representatives of "the rich" appear in these texts. The first is a Pharisee who proves to be a

reluctant host; he is uncomfortable with Jesus' extension of the boundaries of hospitality and stands as a foil to the right response of the woman in the story (7:36–50). The other is Joseph of Arimathea, who uses his resources on Jesus' behalf, running against the current of his peer group (23:50–56).⁹⁴

The final Lukan emphasis identified in Chapter 3 is that *God has a clearly defined purpose for the use of material surplus*. That purpose is generous almsgiving and lavish hospitality, extended beyond the confines of kinship and reciprocity; this divine plan stands in contrast to greed and acquisitiveness. The antithesis between generosity and hospitality, on the one hand, and self-focused consumption, on the other, also permeates the passages considered in this chapter. Generosity and hospitality are illustrated in the extravagant gratitude of the woman who anoints Jesus (Luke 7:36–50) and in the boundary-less hospitality extended by Jesus to the crowd (Luke 9:10–17), while self-focused consumption is seen in the resource-clutching behavior of the two lost sons (Luke 15:11–32) and in the contempt for sinners that keeps the self-congratulating Pharisee from practicing almsgiving and boundary-less community (Luke 18:9–14).

We have seen, then, that the Lukan texts examined in this chapter, which make implicit or indirect connections between the motif of wealth and possessions and the themes of reversal and right response, demonstrate the same cluster of emphases as those observed in Chapter 3. These five emphases are threads that run strongly through the entirety of Luke's Gospel, weaving together episode after episode in his narrative.

3 Conclusions about Luke's View of Wealth and Possessions in the Gospel

In Chapter 2 we saw that the Lukan introduction (1:5–4:44) establishes a close link between the intertwined themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. This connection shines most clearly in the Magnificat and the Nazareth sermon, which set programmatic parameters for Luke's understanding of Jesus' mission. The link is also clearly present in the positive response of various characters to God's work in Jesus in Luke 1–4. Chapters 3 and 4 have demonstrated that the same intersection between the motif of wealth and possessions and the themes of reversal and right response

94 Joseph's position near the end of the Luke's Gospel, where he is presented as both rich and righteous, may serve to prepare the reader for a more nuanced portrait of wealthy persons in Acts.

is also deeply embedded in the body of the Gospel (Luke 5–24).⁹⁵ This intersection is an essential *Grundsatz* of the mission of Jesus' followers, as Luke conceives it.

A narrative reading of the pertinent texts in the Third Gospel has built a cumulative portrait of this important intersection of elements (wealth, possessions, reversal, and right response) in the life of disciples. Five consistent,⁹⁶ interrelated emphases have been discerned as shaping that portrait in Luke 5–24, both in passages that explicitly link the themes of reversal and right response with the motif of wealth and possessions and in passages where the link is more indirect. First, the essential nature of discipleship can be summarized by two verbs: leaving and following. Within that leaving there is always an inescapable element of distancing oneself from old sources of security, most especially, wealth.⁹⁷ Second, for Luke, leaving and following are the essential components of discipleship for *all* who would follow Jesus, not just for the Twelve or for a special "professional" class of followers.⁹⁸ Every right response to Jesus (i.e., becoming a follower) involves leaving behind the old relationship to wealth and possessions, expressed variously as giving, selling, renouncing, and using.⁹⁹ Third, Luke clearly intends his readers to understand

95 As noted earlier, my conclusion here differs from that of Metzger, *Consumption*, 189–90, who sees only a limited outworking of the Nazareth ethos, primarily in the four Lukan parables of the Travel Narrative (12:13–21; 15:11–32; 16:1–13, 19–31), where he discerns an "uncompromising sectarian position" that is not present in the rest of Luke 5–24.

96 I concur with Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 185, that Luke's perspective on wealth, while complex and nuanced, is indeed consistent, and that its "sundry applications" are not arbitrary, "as if Luke endorses an ethical free-for-all."

97 While Johnson, *Literary Function*, 220–22, is certainly correct that in the Third Gospel one's relationship to possessions is symbolic of one's primary loyalty, that metaphorical aspect must not be allowed to obscure the very real economic aspects of Jesus' call to leave material security, expressed so clearly in the invitations to discipleship (5:1–11, 27–32) and in the renunciation imperatives (12:33; 14:33; 18:22).

98 Despite my general agreement with Hays' conclusions (see above), I am less persuaded by his attempt to deal with the nuances of Luke's wealth ethic by imposing on the text a social-critical reconstruction of various categories of believers to whom the Gospel's requirements apply differently (poor/rich itinerants, poor/rich non-itinerants). One need not adopt Hays' proposed categorizations, however, to accept that he is correct in suggesting that "Luke hardly propounds a single, monolithic form of discipleship; he approvingly describes multiple practices which vary according to an individual disciple's vocation and wealth. Still, in whatever form it takes, nobody can follow Jesus who does not renounce all of their possessions." Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 186.

99 I agree with John Gilman that common to all these responses is an appeal to "create a new social situation in which the basic needs of all are satisfied." This will be seen clearly in the analysis of Acts in Chapter 4. Gilman, *Possessions and the Life of Faith: A Reading of Luke-Acts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 93.

that the values governing the behavior and attitudes of Jesus' followers should reflect the priorities of the eschatological kingdom and are a reversal of accepted human norms.¹⁰⁰ Most notably, the ethic of reciprocity is rejected, and replaced with an ethic of persistent generosity and boundary-less hospitality. Fourth, Luke uses "poor" in two different ways, but "rich" in an exclusively economic sense. When describing disciples (i.e., right responders), "poor" is a soteriological categorization, indicating those who trust in God and who, by their loyalty to Jesus, risk their other sources of security. However, when the Lukan Jesus speaks prescriptively to disciples regarding their responsibilities, "the poor" are always the excluded and marginalized who are the special objects of disciples' generosity. The descriptive use of "poor" parallels the emphasis in Luke's introduction on responsiveness *among* the poor, while the prescriptive usage reflects the Gospel's emphasis (Luke 5–24) on responsiveness *toward* the poor as an essential element of right response to God's work of reversal in Jesus. Fifth, God's clearly defined purpose for the use of material surplus (wealth) is that it be destined to bless others.¹⁰¹ In Luke's perspective, there is no middle ground for disciples in their relationship to wealth; either it will be their master and they will use it for self-focused gain and status, or it will be a resource destined to bless others as part of the disciples' faithful response to Jesus.

Luke's portrait of Jesus' mission in the introduction to his Gospel is fully consistent with his description of discipleship in the body of the Gospel. It remains now to explore whether this paradigmatic portrait continues in Luke's second volume. Therefore, in the next chapter, we turn to a narrative analysis of the Acts of the Apostles, asking whether Luke's perspective on wealth and possessions in the Gospel carries over into Acts and whether the same cluster of emphases is present in his second volume.

100 As López Rodríguez, *Liberating Mission*, 53, puts it: discipleship is a following of Jesus that "comes with a precise cost, which expresses itself in the challenge to feel, think, and act as disciples within a society governed by values different from the values of the kingdom."

101 I agree with Gilman, *Possessions*, 182, who assesses Luke's achievement at this point: "the receptive reader is challenged to practice a generosity limited only by the presence or absence of persons in need."

What about Acts? Is Luke's Hermeneutical Lens Still in Place?

In Chapter 1, we examined the hermeneutical significance of Luke's introduction for the rest of his Gospel and made a case for setting the scope of the introduction as Luke 1:5–4:44. Recognizing the entirety of Luke 4 in the introductory unit acknowledges how the Evangelist uses illustrative anecdotes (4:31–44) to reinforce the programmatic summary of Jesus' ministry as "proclaiming good news to the poor" (4:16–30). This finale to the Lukan introduction (proclamation + illustration) summarizes in overt and climactic fashion the message that Luke builds throughout the entire introductory unit: the motif of wealth and possessions is intimately connected to the themes of reversal and right response.

Chapter 2 examined narratively the pericopae of Luke's introduction (Luke 1:5–44), exploring the way the Evangelist establishes a connection between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. The cumulative evidence of the introduction demonstrates that Luke sees some kind of upheaval or reversal of norms and practices happening as God's salvation is realized through Jesus, and that at least part of that disturbance of the status quo has to do with expectations, behaviors, and attitudes related to wealth and possessions. The analysis of the Lukan introduction also revealed a subtle but persistent pattern of right response to God's work in Jesus among the poor and the powerless, in contrast to hostile responses among the powerful and the wealthy.

Chapter 3 and 4 demonstrated how that introductory pattern was then carried out in the rest of the Gospel. Twenty-three texts in the body of the Gospel (Luke 5–24) make either explicit or implicit links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. A narrative reading of those passages demonstrated the presence of five consistent Lukan emphases. First, the essence of discipleship (i.e., right response) is expressed as *leaving* and *following*, with the "leaving" including the abandonment of traditional sources of security and identity, including financial resources. Second, the actions of leaving and following are required of *all* disciples, not just the Twelve or a class of "specialists." Third, the values governing the behaviors and attitudes of Jesus' disciples (i.e., right responders) reflect the priorities of the eschatological kingdom and are a reversal of human norms, particularly the

norm of reciprocity. Fourth, Luke's use of "poor" is polyvalent, but "rich" is always used as an economic categorization with persistent negative connotations for discipleship. And finally, God has a clearly defined will for economic surplus—a charity that includes almsgiving but surpasses it through identification with the poor in a barrier-less community, expressed especially through inclusive table fellowship.

The working assumption of this project is that Luke-Acts is a narrative unity.¹ As Henry J. Cadbury so famously put it, Acts is neither "appendix nor afterthought," but an essential part of Luke's narrative design.² Therefore, even though the primary focus is the Third Gospel, our look at Luke's wealth ethic would be incomplete without comparing the conclusions drawn from Luke's first volume with the evidence from his second book. The question to be answered in this chapter is: Does Luke continue to develop in Acts the perspective on wealth and possessions that we have observed in the Gospel? Narrative analysis will proceed along the same lines used in Chapters 3 and 4: first, the texts in Acts that present a direct link between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions will be examined; then a second set of texts with indirect links between the two elements will be analyzed.³ Finally, conclusions about Acts' perspective on wealth and possessions will be compared with the conclusions drawn from the previous analysis of Luke's Gospel. We will see that the Lukan emphasis on the link between the themes of reversal and right response and the motifs of wealth and possessions continues to play a significant role in his portrait of Jesus' followers in Acts. In general, the hues of that portrait are more subtly painted in Acts than in the Gospel, but nonetheless they are still present and recognizable.

1 See, e.g., William Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 1–22; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986, 1990); Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), xiii–xxx. Michael F. Bird, "The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion," *JSNT* 29 (2007): 425–47; Patrick E. Spencer, "The Unity of Luke-Acts: A Four-Bolted Hermeneutical Hinge," *CurBR* 5 (2007), 341–66; and Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), especially 550–73. For perspectives that concede *authorial* unity to the two volumes without necessarily affirming their *narrative* unity, see Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993) and C. Kevin Rowe, "History, Hermeneutics, and the Unity of Luke-Acts," *JSNT* 28 (2005): 131–57.

2 Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 8.

3 Each text will be analyzed specifically in terms of how it relates to this investigation; many significant exegetical points will be left untouched, because they are outside the scope of this project. For details on other exegetical aspects of interest to the reader, see the commentaries listed in the bibliography.

1 Explicit Links between the Themes of Reversal and Right Response and the Motif of Wealth and Possessions in Acts

There are eight passages in Acts that demonstrate an explicit link between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions.⁴ They will be examined sequentially here, with the first two combined under a single heading.

1.1 *The Summaries of the Life of the Early Church (Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35)*

There are various structural parallels between the introduction to the Third Gospel (Luke 1:5–4:44) and the opening unit of Luke's second volume (the Jerusalem narratives, Acts 1:6–7:60).⁵ One of those parallels is the use of summaries. As the introduction to the Third Gospel was punctuated by brief summaries of Jesus' ministry, so also the scenes narrated in the opening unit of Acts are linked by summaries describing the corporate life of the Jerusalem church (2:42–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16).⁶ The first two summaries make an explicit connection between positive response to the gospel proclamation and a community life characterized by a strikingly counter-cultural orientation toward wealth and possessions, an orientation that is consistent with the ethic modeled in Luke's Gospel.

There is extensive literature on the question of the historicity of these first two Lukan summaries. Because the focus of this project is on the *narrative* function of the summaries and what they reveal about Luke's wealth ethic, the larger debate will not be engaged in detail here.⁷ Justo González

4 Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–35; 4:36–5:11; 6:1–6; 8:4–24; 9:36–43; 11:27–30; 20:33–35.

5 See Talbert, *Reading Acts*, xxiv–xxv, 1–57, and Luc Devillers, "The Infancy of Jesus and the Infancy of the Church: From the Canticles (Luke 1–2) to the Summaries (Acts 1–7)," in *Infancy Gospels: Stories and Identities*, ed. Claire Clivaz, Andreas Dettwiler, Luc Devillers, and Enrico Norelli (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 351–73 (356–58).

6 On the alternation between scene (event) and summary in the Jerusalem section of Acts, see Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 2:43.

7 For the larger discussion, see the commentaries. For critics who argue that renunciation was a real practice but quickly abandoned, see Walter Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1981), 100; Wolfgang Stegemann, "Vagabond Radicalism in Early Christianity? A Historical and Theological Discussion of a Thesis Proposed by Gerd Theissen," in *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. Willy Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 148–68 (154); Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. McConnell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 117–19; F. Gerald Downing, "Theophilus' First Reading of Luke-Acts," in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 91–109 (102).

offers convincing arguments for the historical existence of practices of generous, open-handed community life in the first two centuries of the church's existence, thus weakening any move to dismiss the summaries as merely "utopian" or stylized portraits of unrealized ideals.⁸ Our immediate interest, however, is in Luke's narrative use of the summaries and how they contribute to his portrayal of the role of wealth and possessions in the life of the Christian community.

The summaries function as "freeze frame shots,"⁹ focusing the reader's attention on important aspects of Luke's portrait of the Jerusalem community. Luke inserts the first summary statement about the corporate life of Jesus' followers between the initial empowering of the church in Pentecost event,¹⁰ with the resulting "growth spurt" (2:1–41), and the initial paradigmatic pairing of proclamation and power (3:1–26) as characteristic of the Jesus community.¹¹ The Spirit-filled community's size had suddenly expanded from 120 (1:15) to 3,000 members (2:41), and it was no longer primarily itinerant in nature (as in the Gospel), but settled in one geographical center, Jerusalem (2:46). Through the summary, Luke gives readers a glimpse into that new kind of community life,¹² a pneumatic corporate existence whose

8 The evidence González musters includes the collection for the needy that receives substantial attention in the Pauline writings, as well as *Didache* 4.7–8; *Epistle of Barnabas* 19.8; *Address to Diognetus* 5.7; as well as comments in the writings of Justin Martyr and Tertullian. He also notes that Paul's remarks about the collection for poor believers (Rom 15:25–28; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:1–6) make clear that "what we have there is a continuation of the *koinonía* described in Acts, although now widened to include the Church in various cities." Justo L. González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 73. See also C. K. Barrett, *Acts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:252, and René Krüger, "Conversion of the Pocketbook: The Economic Project of Luke's Gospel," in *God's Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America*, ed. Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 169–201 (173).

9 Devillers, 356.

10 Alexei Streltsov emphasizes correctly that in Luke's narrative flow it is Pentecost, rather than Hellenistic ideals or Jewish patterns, that provides the impetus behind the sharing of possessions. Streltsov, "The Sacramental Character of Sharing Possessions in Acts," *Logia* 16 (2007): 13–19 (14). Steve Walton makes a similar point: "Divine power [i.e., Pentecost] is behind the earthly believers' ability to hold their possessions lightly." Walton, "Primitive Communism in Acts? Does Acts Present the Community of Goods (2:44–45; 4:32–35) as Mistaken?" *EvQ* 80 (2008): 99–111 (105).

11 Throughout Acts, the apostolic "signs and wonders" are paired with the proclamation of the gospel message, either to prepare hearers to receive the message or to confirm the message already proclaimed (e.g., Acts 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12). See Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 220–24.

12 Brian Capper argues that rather than a new kind of community, Luke is portraying the Jerusalem church along the lines of first-century Essene patterns of corporate life. There is a very strong sense in the narrative, however, that Luke is indeed interested in the

distinctive elements include the way that the community handles wealth and possessions.¹³

The verbs in Luke's first summary of community life are all in the imperfect, as befits the description of an ongoing reality.¹⁴ These verbs distinguish Luke's understanding of "the recurring disciplines that sustain and mark the distinctiveness of the Jesus community."¹⁵ First, Luke says, "they were devoting themselves" (ἦσαν προσκαρτεροῦντες, Acts 2:42) to a common life that reflected their commitment to Jesus' words and example.¹⁶ Their devotion centered on four elements:¹⁷ the apostles' teaching; fellowship (κοινωνία);¹⁸ breaking bread; and prayer. Barrier-less community and breaking bread together are consistent with Luke's portrayal of the dominical teaching about life in the kingdom of God.¹⁹ Second, Luke says they "were together" (ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ, 2:44). Their shared relationship to Jesus brought them into shared physical presence with one another. Third, they "had all things in common" (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ, 2:44).

newness and uniqueness of the Christian community's life together, not in its similarity to existing patterns. Capper, "Holy Community of Life and Property amongst the Poor: A Response to Steve Walton," *EvQ* 80 (2008): 113–27 (118).

- 13 "Because the Spirit-propelled alternative touches every dimension of life, it is no surprise that we have hints and traces of evidence of an alternative economy that is reflective of the radicality of the Gospel of Luke." Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 205.
- 14 Witherington suggests that the iterative imperfect in the two summaries indicates "historical distance from a practice that was repeated or ongoing for a period of time." Witherington, *Acts*, 205.
- 15 Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 208.
- 16 The verb προσκαρτερέω occurs 4× in the introductory chapters of Acts (1:14; 2:42, 46; 6:4) as well as in Acts 8:13; 10:7.
- 17 With Barrett, *Acts* 1:62–66; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 34; Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 48; and Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 92–93. Witherington, *Acts*, 160, perceives here only two elements of corporate life, teaching and fellowship, with prayer and breaking bread particularizing the latter.
- 18 Christopher Hays notes that κοινωνία refers in the first instance to sharing in something (often money), and, secondarily and derivatively, to fellowship. He argues that in Acts 2:42–45, the latter leads to the former. Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 191. See also Barrett, *Acts* 1:63–64, and Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke's View of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 129–30.
- 19 Given Luke's persistent emphasis on table fellowship in the Gospel and given the role that boundary-less hospitality will continue to play in Acts, I tend to agree with Graham Twelftree that what is in view in this summary is community meal-sharing, rather than a reference to the Lord's Supper. See Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke's View of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 115–16. For views that "breaking bread" may include the Lord's Supper as well as normal meals, see the discussions in Keener, *Acts* 1:1004, and Wolfgang Vondey, *People of Bread: Rediscovering Ecclesiology* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2008), 175–78.

Their unity was not a spiritualized, theoretical fellowship with little impact on the materiality of life. Luke makes it clear that being the community of Jesus' followers impacted their relationship with their possessions.

With the final three imperfect verbs in this opening summary of community life, Luke particularizes the ongoing contours of believers' new relationship with wealth. Having all things in common meant that "they would sell" (ἐπίπρασκον, Acts 2:45). What they sold is specified with two separate nouns referring to possessions (τὰ κτήματα, τὰς ὑπάρξεις), with the former probably referring to ownership of land.²⁰ The imperfect tense of the verb indicates not an immediate, once-for-all divestiture of all property, but a continual practice of selling property as needs arose. As in the Gospel, a right response to Jesus included a new relationship to wealth and possessions; the community was characterized by a radically open-handed generosity. After selling possessions or lands, "they would distribute" (διεμέριζον, 2:45). The distribution of the proceeds (simply "them" in the Greek) was to "all who were in any need." The pairing of "sell and distribute" is strongly reminiscent of Jesus' command to the rich ruler (Luke 18:22).²¹ The focus is not on a "community of goods," but on the permanent disposition to sell goods for the purpose of meeting needs. Finally, they were "breaking bread" (μετελάμβανον τροφῆς, 2:46). The emphasis returns to the fact that this community's life together centered around table fellowship,²² which had been a central element in Jesus' modeling of a right response to God's kingdom in Luke's Gospel.²³ This table fellowship was characterized by "joyful and sincere hearts" and accompanied by a cluster of other actions: they were breaking bread "from house to house" (κατ'οἶκον, 2:46),

20 See Acts 4:34; 5:1.

21 Acts 2:45 pairs ἐπίπρασκον and διεμέριζον; Luke 18:22 uses πώλησον and διάδος, which reappear together in the second summary, Acts 4:32–35.

22 There is great merit to Brian Capper's suggestion that Luke chose to emphasize table fellowship because he saw it as the single most practical and significant way that mutuality and kingdom practices could be implemented in the communities for which he was writing. Brian Capper, "Reciprocity and the Ethic of Acts," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 499–518 (512). As Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 193, notes, boundary-less table fellowship would certainly have ameliorated significantly "the financial burdens of the impoverished in the community, since food is the primary expense of a poor person."

23 "Luke articulates his vision of early Christian unity carefully, in terms meant to exceed the expectations of his contemporaries. Grounding the meal in the same κοινωνία that produced the sharing of possessions in common (as opposed to merely patronal benevolence) contrasts starkly with the usual purpose of meals in the rest of the urban Mediterranean world ... Jesus specifically challenged this hierarchical notion of shared meals, demanding that those with resources invite those who cannot repay them even in honor (Luke 14:1–14)." Keener, *Acts* 1:1006.

a distributive phrase that, combined with the imperfect verb, serves to intensify the sense of sharing and commonality in their corporate life;²⁴ they were persevering together (προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδόν) in the temple; they were praising God; and they were having grace or favor (χάρις) with all the people.²⁵

Luke's first summary portrait of Christian community in Acts is entirely consistent with his portrayal of discipleship in the Gospel. He concludes this initial summary by describing the divine side of their life together: "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). This divine action parallels the divine voice of approval in the Gospel's introduction (Luke 3:22). The approval was spoken to Jesus at the outset of his public ministry ("You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased"); in Acts, the divine approval is manifested through God's gift of growth at the outset of their corporate existence.

The second summary of the corporate life of Jesus' followers (Acts 4:32–35) also comes at a strategic point in the opening unit of Acts. Luke sets this summary between the community's initial response to *external* hostility (4:1–31) and the initial failure of discipleship from *within* the community (4:36–5:11). This second summary makes clear that, even in the face of external pressure and potential persecution, the community's faithful living continues to be characterized by a radical reorientation towards wealth and possessions. The structure of this summary is consonant with its message, with two descriptions of the community's relationship to its possessions forming a frame around the central statement about powerful testimony and corporate grace:

A (4:32) The believers were of one heart and being (τῶν πιστευσάντων ἧν καρδίᾳ καὶ ψυχῇ μία), a unity characterized by the relinquishment of claims to private ownership and the disposition of possessions for the common good.²⁶ They had possessions but their orientation toward them was open-handed; literally, "not one of them was saying that his possessions were his own."²⁷ As in the first summary, it is clear that their "sell

24 The NRSV translates this simply "at home," which misses the distributive nature of the phrase (as in Acts 2:46, where καθ' ἡμέραν is translated "day by day"). See Barrett, *Acts* 1:170.

25 "Luke wants to leave no doubt that there is an important connection between community life and the 'favor' the community experienced with outsiders. This kind of engagement has a positive effect on mission." Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 155.

26 The combination of phrases, "one heart and soul" and "all things in common," evokes both Hellenistic ideals of friendship and the OT concept of the people of God. See the discussions in Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:45; Witherington, *Acts*, 204–206; Keener, *Acts* 1:1013–23; and C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 136.

27 Καὶ οὐδὲ εἰς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ ἔλεγεν ἴδιον.

and give” pattern is not a single-stroke divestiture but rather a willingness to renounce goods over and over again on behalf of needy members of the community. This is a corporate generosity that goes beyond mere almsgiving, setting the emphasis on the mutuality of their life together.²⁸

B (4:33) In what could seem at first glance like a non sequitur, Luke now pairs powerful apostolic testimony to the resurrection with the presence of “great grace” (χάρις μεγάλη) upon all the believers. The opening καὶ (4:33), however, links this power and grace directly to the kind of community life Luke has just described (4:32). There is an indissoluble connection between the character of the community and its power for witness, and for Luke, that distinctive corporate character is best displayed in the community’s attitude toward wealth and possessions.

A¹ (4:34–35) They were a community without needy persons, due to their characteristic use of possessions: sell,²⁹ bring (to the apostles), distribute (to those who had need),³⁰ Bringing and laying the proceeds at the feet of the apostles shows a double divestiture—the believers gave up both ownership of the item sold and the right to choose how the funds were used. Luke specifies the things sold as “land or houses” (χωρίων ἢ οἰκιῶν), indicating that there were persons of comfortable economic means within the community.³¹ The presence of both a noun form (κτήτορες) and a verb form (ὑπάρχον) for ownership may also serve to emphasize this point, as well as indicating that the giving was voluntary: the owner chose to sell the property, donate the proceeds, and relinquish his ownership rights. The reality that “there was not a needy person (ἐνδεής) among them” fulfills the kind of community life to which Israel was called.³² This is a communal practice of “neighborliness,” a corporate exemplification of

28 “The accent of the description lies not so much on the generosity and help afforded by affluent believers to their needy fellow believers but rather on the sharing of goods as a means of putting down the barriers of social distinctions and building up the community.” Maria Anicia Co, “The Major Summaries in Acts: Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16. Linguistic and Literary Relationships,” *ETL* 68 (1992): 49–85 (73).

29 Both πωλέω and πιπράσκω are used in participial form in Acts 4:34, the former for the act of selling (πωλοῦντες) and the latter for what was sold (τῶν πιπρασκομένων).

30 As in the initial summary (2:42–47), the verbs are in the imperfect, indicating a continuous practice.

31 For an excellent, succinct discussion of the socio-economic makeup of the Jerusalem church, see Witherington’s excursus “A Closer Look—The Social Status and Level of the Earliest Christians,” *Acts*, 210–13.

32 E.g., Deut 15:4–11, where ἐνδεής is used in the LXX. See Dunn, *Acts*, 59.

the boundary-less mercy portrayed in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27–35).³³

The structure of this second summary emphasizes Luke's point that the community's powerful external witness—the central element in the summary—cannot be separated from its internal character. That character, for Luke, is exemplified by the community's attitude toward and use of wealth and possessions.³⁴

Together, the two Lukan summaries in Acts 2–4 showcase Luke's understanding of Christian community. In reality, Luke says very little in the rest of Acts about the internal life of the church, so it is highly significant that in these two key summaries, he highlights strongly his persistent concern for the community's distinctive use of wealth and possessions.³⁵ Luke's portrayal of the selfless orientation toward wealth and possessions of the early Christian community in Jerusalem is offered as a programmatic platform for all that follows.³⁶ It is also worth noting that both these summaries follow special outpourings of the Holy Spirit,³⁷ suggesting that the presence of the Spirit in the Christian community produces not only witness and wonders, but a new kind of relationship with wealth and possessions, exemplified by a deep responsiveness to the needs of the poor.³⁸ In the summaries, then, Luke sets the life of the Christian community in perfect alignment with both the programmatic mission of Jesus ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to

33 I agree with Brueggemann that, while both the Jewish ideal of "neighbor" and the Hellenistic ideal of friendship may be embedded within Luke's summaries, it is the former that predominates. Neighbor "makes more rigorous demands than does 'friend.'" Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 207, n. 2. See also Pervo, *Acts*, 127.

34 Matthew L. Skinner's observations on this second summary are apt: "As we have seen already, in Acts God exhibits an interest in reordering or restoring all aspects of human existence. This passage broadens our understanding of God's salvation, showing the gospel's implications for matters of wealth and social status. Giving to the needy does not earn salvation, but it demonstrates that a person has come to grasp what the economy of salvation is all about: relinquishing one's real and perceived advantages and entering into true solidarity with others." Skinner, *Intrusive God, Disruptive Gospel: Encountering the Divine in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015), 32–33.

35 See Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:46.

36 As Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 211, rightly suggests, the "reason this radical commonality in the church is stated only at the beginning of the book of Acts is that it is the basis of all that follows in the book.... That practice did not need to be reiterated in the text because it is the ground for all that follows."

37 Pentecost, Acts 2; the gift of Spirit-inspired boldness, 4:31.

38 Keener, *Acts* 1:1000, puts it this way: "Luke underlines the point that the outpouring of the Spirit produced not simply short-term numbers but long-term results."

the poor,” Luke 4:18) and the portrait of discipleship in the Third Gospel.³⁹ We will see that this alignment of Luke’s portrait of Christian community with the example of Jesus will not falter as his narrative progresses.

1.2 *Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira (Acts 4:36–5:11)*

Following on the heels of the second summary, the contrasting stories of Barnabas (Acts 4:36–37) and Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11) provide an unusual “drilling down” inside the generalized summaries of community life in the early church.⁴⁰ Perhaps this pericope serves a similar function to that of the Capernaum healings at the end of the Gospel’s introduction (Luke 4:31–44)—it illustrates and specifies the paradigmatic generalizations of the community’s life together as the Capernaum vignettes did for the programmatic description of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 4:14–30).⁴¹ It achieves this end through a pair of stories, the first of which provides a particularization of the community’s ethos of mutuality and commonality. The second offers a sharp contrast by highlighting the non-negotiable importance of a proper orientation towards wealth and possessions within the community. Neglecting the standard of open-handed generosity in favor of tight-fisted clutching of material resources is a threat to the community’s unity and a grievous sin against its Lord.⁴²

With no discernible transition between the summary and the new scene, a new character is introduced: “Joseph, who was called Barnabas” (Acts 4:36). He is the first non-apostolic disciple highlighted by name in Acts.⁴³ Luke gives the reader detailed information about Barnabas (his tribal background, place of origin, the fact that his nickname was assigned by the apostles, 4:36), then describes his actions with the now familiar verbs typical of the Christian community’s orientation toward material possessions: Barnabas *sold* (a field),⁴⁴ *brought* (the proceeds), and *laid* them at the apostles’ feet (4:37). These actions give greater nuance to Joseph’s nickname, Barnabas, which Luke explains means “son of encouragement” (υἱὸς παρακλήσεως, 4:36): his actions model the

39 Leave, sell, give, follow (Luke 5:11, 28; 12:33; 14:33; 18:22, 28; 19:8).

40 Daniel Marguerat calls this episode *un coup de force narratif*. Marguerat, “La mort d’Ananias et Sapphira (Ac 5:1–11) dans la stratégie narrative de Luc,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 209–26 (209).

41 See the discussion in Chapter 2.

42 Pervo, *Acts*, 133, goes so far as to say, “Luke is prepared to classify financial misrepresentation as the most grievous of all sins, more less equating it with θεομαχία (‘opposition to God’).”

43 There is a passing mention of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Acts 1:14.

44 Barnabas’ ownership is emphasized by the phrasing: ὑπάρχοντος αὐτοῦ ἀγροῦ.

right response to wealth and possessions and his example would encourage other believers to respond in the same way.

In fact, the introduction of the next characters, Ananias and Sapphira, might lead the reader to expect just that—someone else from the community who is encouraged by Barnabas' example and responds with similar faithfulness. The mild adversative δέ (Acts 5:1) could mean simply “and,” which temporarily delays the reader's awareness of the contrast that these new actors in the drama will provide.⁴⁵ Awareness is further delayed because Ananias' actions, like Barnabas', follow the now-familiar pattern: sell, bring, lay (at the apostles' feet). However, there is a fourth action, uncharacteristic of the community's God-approved pattern, that comes between the selling and the relinquishment: “with his wife's knowledge,⁴⁶ he *kept back* (ἐνοσφίσατο) from the proceeds” (5:2, emphasis added).⁴⁷ Implicit in the middle voice of the verb is that he kept back a portion *for himself*.⁴⁸ He brought only a part of the proceeds to the apostles, although the subsequent narrative makes clear that the couple had agreed together to pretend they were bringing the full amount (5:4, 8, 9). Ananias and Sapphira's “keeping back” echoes the actions of Achan (Joshua 7:1), where the LXX uses ἐνοσφίσατο to express a withholding that has disastrous results for the community.⁴⁹

45 As Robert F. O'Toole observes, the initial sense that Ananias and Sapphira are indeed imitating Barnabas' example is only temporary; it quickly becomes obvious that this couple does not “actualize being ‘of one heart and soul’ nor the statement that nothing the Christians possessed was their own and everything was held in common (4,32). The contrast centers on the different attitudes toward possessions.” O'Toole, “You Did Not Lie to Us (Human Beings) but to God,” *Bib* 76 (1995): 182–209 (188).

46 With its hint of “complicity” or “plotting,” giving it a negative connotation, συνειδυής adds another layer to the emerging negative portrait of the couple. It is interesting to note that Luke assigns full agency to the woman; Sapphira is responsible for her choices and will pay her own price.

47 Derrett observes keenly that the couple's action betrays lack of trust in God as the source of security and, thus, contradicts the picture of discipleship that Luke has been portraying across both volumes. J. D. M. Derrett, “Ananias, Sapphira, and the Right of Property,” *DRev* 89 (1974): 225–32 (228).

48 Daniel Wallace identifies this as a “clear example” of an indirect middle voice, which calls attention to the subject and how the action relates to or benefits that subject. *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 419–21.

49 See Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 212. Marguerat, “La mort,” 223–24, also discerns intriguing parallels here between this first crisis in the origins of the church and the crisis of Genesis 3, “with a constellation of corresponding features”: (a) the destruction of original harmony; (b) the presence of Satan; (c) the crisis originates with the sin of a couple; (d) the lie to God; (e) expulsion from community.

Peter characterizes their deceit as “lying to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5:3, 9), a behavior made possible because Ananias gave space to Satan in his life.⁵⁰ The apostle’s question to Sapphira (5:9) evokes Joshua’s question to Achan: “Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord is bringing trouble on you today” (Josh 7:25). Peter’s prophetic analysis of their actions is indicative of how Luke understands the relationship between a disciple of Jesus and his or her possessions. Peter makes no denial of the couple’s right to ownership of the piece of property: “While it remained unsold, did it not remain *your own*? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds *at your disposal*?” (5:4, emphasis added). Nothing about the community’s generous life is forced. The sin was not in retaining a portion, but in pretending to have given all, thus mocking the generosity and relinquishment modeled by Barnabas and others.⁵¹ It is possible that the couple was attempting to use the norms of the new community (generosity and mutuality) to acquire honor for themselves without a true commitment to the dominical ethos and example behind those norms.⁵² Whatever their motivation, the judgment upon them is swift and terrible; one after the other, Ananias and Sapphira are struck down, in a manner that recalls the swift demise of those who offered unholy fire before the Lord and were carried out immediately from his presence (Lev 10:1, 5). Ananias and Sapphira bear out Jesus’ stern warnings about the mortal dangers of wealth.⁵³

“Great fear” came upon “the whole church and all who heard of these things” (5:11). The seriousness with which Luke takes the economic life of the community is seen in the severity of the divine punishment that he records.⁵⁴ Just as Luke has linked the community’s life of commonality and altruism to divine

50 See Luke’s similar assessment of Judas’ choice (Luke 22:3). F. Scott Spencer, making reference to the Judas passage in the Gospel as well as to Luke 4:5–18 and Acts 1:18–19, notes that the readers of Luke’s Gospel “will recognize a pattern of diabolical efforts to infiltrate and sabotage the Jesus movement by appealing to human greed.” Spencer, *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 67.

51 Ananias and Sapphira’s action “was a falsification of what the Spirit was doing and was prompting the community to do and to be.” Witherington, *Acts*, 217.

52 As Keener, *Acts* 2:1183, puts it, “Ananias and Sapphira wanted to join God’s community while also retaining their personal autonomy from God’s authority. They thereby risked infiltrating God’s church with Satan’s agenda (5:3). God’s decisive action against them guarantees that, for the time being at least, only true believers (5:13), and not compromising ones (5:13), will join the movement.” See also the discussion of Simon (Acts 8:4–25) below.

53 See Luke 6:24–26; 12:13–21; 16:14–15, 25; 18:24–25. Hays’ comment is correct: “Essentially, in Acts we see the vindication of the proclamation of Jesus about money. Whereas in the Gospel the dire nature of loving money is verbally pronounced, Acts makes it clear that Luke’s Jesus did not speak hollow words.” Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics*, 224.

54 The swift, severe punishment also echoes the Achan story (Josh 7:1, 25–26).

favor and power (2:47; 4:33), so now he connects self-interest in the community to divine judgment.⁵⁵ This all takes place in public, in the eyes of the gathered community—if Ananias and Sapphira were seeking honor by presenting their gift, they ended up with infamy instead. The irony of their ignominious end is highlighted by the twice-repeated description of perfunctory, dishonorable burial.⁵⁶

This episode is followed by the third summary in the introductory unit (5:12–16), which once again builds a narrative link between the community's ethos of generous mutuality and the triad of powerful witness, corroborating signs and wonders, and divinely-granted growth. Luke is carefully painting a portrait of the early church that is consistent with the perspective toward wealth that he demonstrated in the Gospel: this is a community that is learning to hold loosely to material possessions, that is using material surplus to meet the needs of others rather than to accumulate for personal security or comfort, and that has rejected an ethic of reciprocity for one of persistent generosity and boundary-less hospitality. The reiterated note that God is giving growth to such a community is one of Luke's strategies for emphasizing the God-pleasing nature of this kind of discipleship.

Although this pair of episodes (Barnabas, Acts 4:36–37; Ananias and Sapphira, 5:1–11) and its adjoining summary (5:12–16) form the last scene in which Luke sets the community's wealth ethic on center stage, there are five more passages scattered through the Book of Acts that keep the reader alert to this emphasis by making explicit links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. It is to these five pericopae that we now turn.

1.3 *The Daily Distribution of Food (Acts 6:1–6)*

Within the Jerusalem portion of his narrative (Acts 1:6–7:60), Luke includes the story of another serious threat to the young Christian community's characteristic life of generosity and mutuality. This new danger also arises at the point of the community's economic practices. The initial threat, caused by Ananias and Sapphira's clutch-fisted relationship with their wealth, was overcome by swift and decisive divine intervention, followed by powerful, Spirit-filled witness and even more growth in numbers. This provoked overt hostility from the

55 Marguerat, "La Mort," 217, notes that Luke's interest in the *community* of disciples is essential for understanding the interpretive force of the divine judgment here. "Luke does not depict the drama of individual salvation endangered by a criminal act; he reports how the primitive community ... was saved from division by the effective judgement of God."

56 On the dishonor accrued by a burial that failed to follow cultural norms, see the discussions in Witherington, *Acts*, 217, and Keener, *Acts* 2:1194–95.

Jewish leadership, to which the apostles and believers responded with undeterred boldness (Acts 5:17–41). Luke makes the transition to the next episode with a summary statement: “And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as Messiah” (5:42).

The next paragraph opens: “Now in those days,”⁵⁷ when the disciples were increasing in number” (6:1). That is, at the very moment when all was going well, when the young community of Jesus’ followers had proven itself faithful in the midst of opposition, when the common good was shaping its financial dealings,⁵⁸ and when daily increase was happening—at that very moment the new threat arose: “There was a murmuring of the Hellenists toward the Hebrews” (6:1).⁵⁹ Since to this point in the story Luke has pictured an all-Jewish community of believers, he must mean here Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora complaining about Aramaic-speaking Jews from Palestine.⁶⁰ The nature of the complaint reveals that, for Luke, “having all things in common” includes daily care for the vulnerable (i.e., widows),⁶¹ it also reveals how fragile that commonality was in the face of pre-existing group loyalties. The cause of the grumbling was that “their widows (that is, the Greek-speaking widows) were not being attended in the daily service” (διακονία, 6:1).⁶² The imperfect (παρεθεωροῦντο) indicates that the complaint was provoked not by a single event, but by a perceived pattern of neglect. Luke is clearly showing that preexisting lines of social and cultural division threatened to fracture the Christian

57 “In those days” (ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις) evokes LXX language, often employed for marking important moments or transitions (e.g., Gen 6:4; Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25; 1 Sam 4:1; 28:1; 2 Sam 16:23; 2 Kgs 10:32; 15:37; 20:1/Isa 38:1; Neh 6:17; 13:15, 23; Esth 1:2; Jer 5:18; Joel 2:29 [3:2 LXX]; Zech 8:10, 23).

58 As Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:80, notes, “The threat to unity appears precisely in the area of the church’s life where unity had been most clearly demonstrated: the sharing of wealth with the needy.”

59 “Murmuring” is my translation of γογγυσμός. Keener, *Acts* 2:1261, notes the negative OT background of both the noun and verb forms in connection with Israel’s sins against Moses and God (Exod 16:7–9, 12; 17:3; Num 14:27, 29; 16:41; 17:5, 10; Ps 106:25).

60 Bruce, *Acts*, 120, is likely correct in saying that the main difference between the two groups was linguistic, including their preferred language for synagogue worship, but he also notes that there were cultural tensions between them, which did not automatically disappear when they became followers of Jesus. See also Barrett, *Acts* 1:304, and Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 23–24.

61 Clearly the young community saw the OT mandate to care for widows as part of its ethos of commonality and care for the needy (e.g., Deut 14:29; 24:19; 26:12; Isa 1:17).

62 Todd Penner is right to note that “for Luke, the response of a person or group to widows characterizes them either positively or negatively in the narrative.” Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen, the Hellenists, and Lukan Apologetic Historiography* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 265. See also Spencer, *Journeying*, 75.

community from within, right along the fault line of the distribution of material goods.⁶³ As Bruce points out, it is not theological differences that threaten to divide the community, but economic tensions.⁶⁴

The apostles' prompt response is completely consistent with the pattern established by Jesus in Luke's Gospel. They affirmed the importance of table fellowship and poor care as hallmarks of the new community.⁶⁵ They used the word "service" (διακονία) for both their own ministry of word and prayer and the new ministry of supervising the service to widows (Act 6:2, 4),⁶⁶ giving equal importance and validity to both.⁶⁷ They were not denigrating one service and elevating the other; they were simply following Jesus' example of "delegating some of his ministry because the need was too large for him to address by himself (Luke 9:1, 13–14; 10:1)."⁶⁸ The relative importance of the "table service" is seen when Luke describes the necessary qualities of the supervisors in "apostolic" terms: they should be "of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). For Luke, the care of the widows was no peripheral or insignificant part of the community's corporate life. The Spirit-led community selected seven men who met the criteria established by the apostles;⁶⁹ all seven of them were likely Hellenists, since they all had Greek names (6:5).⁷⁰ These seven Greek-speaking Jews were appointed to handle the distribution of

63 "That the problem broke out along ethnic lines is not surprising, as most relationships would be affected by these distinctions. The community is aware, however, that such distinctions cannot be maintained and supported in a community that confesses a Messiah who has come to give God's grace to all types of people." Bock, *Acts*, 258.

64 Bruce, *Acts*, 120.

65 See Jesus' description of his mission as "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18; 7:22) and his exhortations to boundary-less table fellowship in the parables of Luke 14.

66 González, *Acts*, 90, suggests that "wait on tables," in addition to its literal meaning, probably also meant the distribution of the funds for the meals, "for 'the tables' were also the place in which economic transactions took place, and therefore very often the management of money was called serving at tables." If he is correct, this heightens the economic thrust of the passage.

67 Holly Beers observes that it is mainly non-apostles who take up the service ministry in Acts. What she calls a "decentralization motif" is part of the Lukan portrait of discipleship that is not two-tiered or divided into specialists and non-specialists. Beers, *The Followers of Jesus as the "Servant": Luke's Model from Isaiah for the Disciples in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 179.

68 Keener, *Acts* 2:1269.

69 The selection of seven persons to share in the ministry tasks with the apostles probably evokes both the selection of 70 (or 72) to share in Jesus' ministry (Luke 10) and the selection of 70 elders to share in Moses' ministry (Numbers 11). See the discussion in Keener, *Acts* 2:1278.

70 See Dunn, *Acts*, 83; Keener, *Acts* 2:1279; and Witherington, *Acts*, 250.

food to *all* the widows of the community—not just to the Hellenists' widows. Boundaries that separated persons were being erased.

Luke concludes with another mini-summary: “The word of God continued to spread; the number of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). The framing of this episode within two summary statements (5:42; 6:7) probably indicates the paradigmatic nature of the passage in the Acts narrative. Luke assumes that the community life of the Jerusalem church is the model behind the Christian communities mentioned in the rest of his narrative.⁷¹ The second summary statement (6:7) describes the results of the Jerusalem community's active and intentional preservation of its distinctive unity in the arena of “having all things in common.” Once again, Luke portrays the disciples' faithfulness to boundary-less table fellowship and care for the poor resulting in the spread of the message about Jesus and the numeric growth of the community.

The “widow care” episode, framed with summary statements, is the last passage in the Jerusalem section of Acts that focuses explicitly on community life. It is followed immediately by the Stephen narrative (6:8–7:60), after which Luke begins the transition outward from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria.⁷² Every summary description of the Christian community in the Jerusalem section of Acts (1:6–7:60) has highlighted that a right response to Jesus includes a new orientation toward wealth and possessions.⁷³ Although such summaries themselves disappear in the rest of Acts, Luke has carefully established the importance of generous mutuality and open-handed, other-oriented use of possessions as one of the hallmarks of Christian community, and he will give glimpses of the persistence of that characteristic as his narrative of the church moves beyond Jerusalem.⁷⁴

71 Contra Brian Capper, “Reciprocity,” 501–503, who maintains that this episode, rather than being paradigmatic, is a “bridge” between a common purse and “organized poor-care” (i.e., alms) as the central socio-economic principle of the church's corporate life.

72 “With a truly audacious gap, the narrator forgoes any reference to the subsequent fate of the ‘daily ministry.’ Rather than speak of contented widows, v. 7 reports the result: unshackled by ‘waiting on tables,’ proclamation of God's message expanded.” Pervo, *Acts*, 162.

73 As Streltsov, “Sacramental Character,” 15, notes, these summaries “not only find their proper place in the context of the first eight chapters of Acts; but they also fit within the larger framework of the whole two-volume work of Luke, organically expanding themes that were expounded during the earthly ministry of Jesus.”

74 Here I agree with Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 190, who argues persuasively for the “continuity between the behavior of the Jerusalem community in Acts 2–6 and the actions of the figures described in the later chapters of Acts.”

1.4 *Simon the Magician (Acts 8:4–25)*

The Jerusalem section of Acts (1:5–7:60) closes with the martyrdom of Stephen, the catalytic event for the expansion of the Jesus movement beyond Jerusalem. After a brief glimpse at a future main character (Saul, 8:1–3),⁷⁵ the narrative focus shifts to Philip, introduced earlier as one of the Seven (Acts 6:5),⁷⁶ and to the penetration of the gospel into Samaria. The initial move from Jerusalem to Samaria accords with Luke's already stated blueprint for the narrative development of his second volume (Acts 1:8) and fits Jesus' established pattern of ministry to the marginalized and outcasts (e.g., Samaritans), "inviting them to a full participation in the restored people of God."⁷⁷ Leaving Jerusalem because of the fierce persecution spearheaded by Saul after Stephen's death, Philip and the other dispersed believers were not aimless refugees. These "scattered ones" (οἱ διασπαρέντες, 8:4) were purposeful emigrants: "They went from place to place, proclaiming the word (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον)."⁷⁸ Εὐαγγελίζω and ὁ λόγος are words that frame the first Samaritan episode (8:4, 25) and function as mini-summaries of Luke's portrait of the new missionary phase of the church's life.⁷⁹

Because this episode falls into Luke's pattern established in the Jerusalem unit—setting an important narrative between two summaries⁸⁰—and because it is the first narrative of the Samaria section, it carries significant interpretive weight. It is no surprise that the motifs (wealth and possessions) and themes (reversal and right response) under scrutiny in this project appear here. Right response to the message about Jesus is at the heart of the Samaria

75 On Luke's tendency to introduce briefly a character who will later play a significant role in the narrative, see Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:78, 99.

76 Ironically, although both Stephen and Philip were introduced to play a role that would free the Twelve for the "service of the word" (i.e., preaching the gospel), Luke quickly moves both men into the role of evangelist. Luke portrays these two non-apostles as doing tasks that formerly only apostles had done in the Acts narrative; this pattern is entirely consistent with what we saw in the Gospel, that there is not a two-tiered discipleship (specialists and non-specialists). See Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:103, and Skinner, *Intrusive God*, 55.

77 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 151.

78 This story (Acts 8:4–25) is a particularization of the community's general response in the face of persecution: bold, persistent proclamation of the gospel (see 4:23–31).

79 Both Acts 8:4 and 8:25 begin with οἱ μὲν οὖν followed by a participle; their parallel structure highlights their function as a frame around the story.

80 Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35 frame the episode of the temple healing and its aftermath; 4:32–35 and 5:12–16 frame the Barnabas/Ananias and Sapphira diptych; 6:1a and 6:7 frame the widow care episode; and 6:8 and 8:1–3 frame the Stephen story.

story.⁸¹ Simon and the Samaritans stand in antithetical relationship in the narrative, with the latter illustrating right response and Simon exemplifying the pernicious impediment to genuine discipleship posed by the drive for money and power.⁸² When Philip arrives announcing Christ in both word and powerful deeds (Acts 8:6–8),⁸³ the Samaritan townspeople, acting as a unified group,⁸⁴ pay close attention (προσεῖχον, 8:6) to the Spirit-authenticated message, responding with great joy. They experience the great reversal of the gospel, as demon-possessed people are liberated and crippled people walk,⁸⁵ and their response is to believe the message about Jesus and the kingdom of God and then to be baptized (8:12). When the apostles arrive from Jerusalem, the believing Samaritans also receive the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶

Simon, on the other hand, stands apart from the Samaritans. Introduced by Luke as “a certain man named Simon” (ἄνθρωπος δὲ τις ὀνόματι Σίμων, 8:9), this character seems to be an outsider who has come into the city for the exclusive purpose of financial gain, since “magicians” did not work gratis.⁸⁷ The enormous influence Simon had on the townspeople—they said he was “someone great” (8:9) and “paid close attention to him” (προσεῖχον, 8:10, 11)—presumably

81 The message about Jesus is called “the word” (Acts 8:4), “the word of God” (8:14), and “the word of the Lord” (8:25).

82 Simon seems to play here the role that the Pharisees played in Luke’s Gospel, a figure that warns about the dangers of greed. It is perhaps not accidental that this character in Acts bears the same name as the only named Pharisee in the Third Gospel (Luke 7:36–50), whose response to Jesus is presented in a similarly ambiguous manner. See Chapter 3.

83 Once again the complementary roles of proclamation and miracle are seen. As Susan R. Garrett notes, “Philip’s deeds were visible and audible enactments of his proclamation; consequently, the deeds were regarded by Luke as fostering belief in the things that Philip spoke.” Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writing* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 65. See also Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 144–45.

84 As Pervo, *Acts*, 206, observes, Luke’s use of ὁμοθυμαδόν here “brings these converts into the realm of the Jerusalem church (e.g., 1:14).” It seems to me that this word choice may be a subtle Lukan hint that the values and characteristics he portrayed so explicitly in the Jerusalem community are to be understood as the norm for all Christian communities in his narrative.

85 This action thus fulfills in the ministry of the church the mission of Jesus (Luke 4:18–19; 7:18–23).

86 For the lengthy, complex discussion about why they did not receive the Holy Spirit when Philip baptized them “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (vs. 15–16), see Barrett, *Acts* 1:307–308; Witherington, *Acts*, 287–90; Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 87, 99; Keener, *Acts*, 2:1522–29; and David J. McCullough, “Ritual Water, Ritual Spirit: A Sequential Reading of the Spirit Reception Scenes in Luke-Acts” (PhD diss., London School of Theology, 2014), 121–25.

87 For excellent discussions of magic and magicians, see Pervo, *Acts*, 207–209, and Keener, *Acts*, 2:1500–1517.

resulted in a corresponding income for him. However, the Samaritans' assessment of Simon—"This is the 'Power of God,' which is called 'Great'" (8:10)—was suddenly eclipsed when they encountered the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12) and saw the signs and great wonders that astonished even the magician himself (8:13). Simon is so impressed that he is baptized along with the Samaritans.

Luke leaves the reader with a certain ambiguity about the genuineness of Simon's conversion. It is clear that Simon has been impressed by the *power*, but not so evident whether he is equally impressed by the *message*.⁸⁸ The use of a key word from the summaries to describe Simon's post-baptism behavior seems to indicate that all is well with Simon's response to the message about Jesus: "he stayed constantly with Philip" (προσκαρτερῶν, Acts 8:13), the same verb used to describe the Jerusalem community's devotion to the apostles' teaching (2:42).⁸⁹ But when the apostles arrive in Samaria, Simon's greed-driven motivation resurfaces: his objective is to "own" the power he sees operating in them. "Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'" (8:18, 19).⁹⁰ Implicit in Simon's petition is the dual desire for both power and profit;⁹¹ if he is willing to pay for the gift, so will others be.⁹² Peter quickly disabuses Simon of the notion that "the gift of God" can be purchased (8:20), and the apostle's next words add to the reader's doubt about whether Simon's conversion was genuine: "You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God" (8:21). With prophetic insight, reminiscent of Jesus' in

88 Barrett, *Acts* 1:409, affirms the genuineness of Simon's conversion, as do Keener, *Acts* 2:1518, and Patrick Fabien, "La conversion de Simon le magicien (Ac 8:4–25)," *Biblica* 91 (2010): 210–40 (218). For a contrary view, see Witherington, *Acts*, 288–89. I tend to agree with Garrett, *Demise*, 67, who sees the narration of Simon's assiduous pursuit of Philip and his amazement at the power as a bright thread that Luke has left dangling for readers to pull and unravel the ambiguity surrounding Simon's conversion.

89 Luke says that Simon was devoted to Philip, not necessarily to his teaching. "This is not the normal way of describing discipleship." Bock, *Acts*, 329.

90 The narrative seems to imply that there was some visible manifestation of Spirit reception, which Simon desired the power to reproduce. See Dunn, *Acts*, 111.

91 A corollary acquisition of power and profit would have been honor. See Bart B. Bruehler, "Reweaving the Texture of Luke 16:14–18," *Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research* 5 (2013): 49–67 (55).

92 Keener, *Acts* 2:1529, notes that "the attempt to buy spiritual power fits the milieu of magicians who traded in magic formulas (cf. 19:19); magicians sought to buy power." See also Barrett, *Acts* 1:413, and Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:106–107.

the Gospel,⁹³ Peter diagnoses Simon's spiritual condition: he is caught in "the gall of bitterness" and bound in "the chains of wickedness" (8:23).⁹⁴ Simon's condition is a graphic illustration of the choice that must be made by Jesus' followers, the decision that Jesus painted as a choice of ultimate loyalties between God and mammon (Luke 16:13). As Brueggemann puts it, "This narrative is yet one more attestation that *the transformative power of the Spirit of God* and *the world of commodity control* are diametrically opposed to each other. The narrative makes clear how gripping is the power of money, even in the face of the gospel."⁹⁵

Like the Ananias and Sapphira episode (Acts 5), the story of Simon is "evidently intended to illustrate abuses in early Christianity precisely in the realm of finance."⁹⁶ However, unlike the case of Ananias and Sapphira,⁹⁷ but similar to that of the rich man in Luke 18, Simon's story is left open for possible repentance (Acts 8:22, 24). The same power that liberated Samaritans from demonic control (8:7) can liberate this magician from mammon control and free him for right response of whole-hearted loyalty to Jesus and full participation in the community whose ethos is shaped by radical generosity and mutuality.

1.5 *Tabitha-Dorcas* (Acts 9:36–43)

Following the narratives of Philip's Samaritan ministry (Acts 8), Luke tells of Saul's conversion (9:1–30), setting the stage for his central role in the second half of the book. In his typical narrative fashion, Luke then sweeps Saul off stage for an interval (9:30),⁹⁸ to return his focus temporarily to the central figure of the first half of Acts, the Apostle Peter (9:31–11:18). In the midst of Peter's "going here and there among the believers," teaching and doing miracles of healing (9:32–35), he is summoned to Joppa on behalf of the believers who are mourning the loss of a significant community member. In this passage, Luke continues to emphasize, this time in a Christian community outside Jerusalem, the connection between discipleship (right response to Jesus) and a generous use of wealth and possessions on behalf of the needy.

93 See, e.g., Luke 4:23; 5:22; 6:8; 7:40; 11:17; 18:9, 22. See also Peter's Spirit-empowered insight in the Ananias and Sapphira story, Acts 5:3–4, 8–9.

94 Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 214, makes a good case for linking the two phrases (gall of bitterness, chains of wickedness) with the intertwined sins that persistently characterized Israel's rebellion—the worship of false gods and the lack of economic justice. See, e.g., Deut 29:18 and Isa 58:6.

95 Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 214, emphasis original.

96 Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 262.

97 On the analogous narrative role of Simon's story with that of Ananias and Sapphira, see Keener, *Acts* 2:1530.

98 See note 80 above.

Luke provides three pieces of information to personalize the believer who has just died.⁹⁹ First, she is a female disciple (μαθήτρια).¹⁰⁰ Peter has just healed a male believer (Aeneas, 9:32–35); now he is about to resuscitate a female disciple.¹⁰¹ This is typical of Luke's tendency to pair male-female stories.¹⁰² Second, this female disciple is named in both Hebraic and Hellenistic forms: Tabitha-Dorcas (9:36). In the resuscitation imperative, Peter (a Palestinian Jew) addresses her by her Aramaic name (Tabitha, 9:40); however, Luke reports that the widows refer to her by her Greek name (Dorcas, 9:39), probably indicating that these women are Hellenistic widows.¹⁰³ Tabitha-Dorcas has bridged the gap between the two factions; the cultural rift that threatened the Jerusalem community (6:1) is not a barrier to unity for the believers in Joppa. The third description Luke provides is that Tabitha-Dorcas' life was characterized by "being full of good works (ἐργων ἀγαθῶν) and alms which she did (ἐλεημοσυνῶν ὧν ἐποίησεν)" (9:36, my translation).¹⁰⁴ The NRSV's "good works and acts of charity" misses Luke's verbal component (ἐποίησεν), which puts emphasis on the *actions* that characterized her.¹⁰⁵ The mention of the widows as a group particularly affected by Tabitha-Dorcas' death (9:39, 41) lends credence to the probability that they were the special recipients of her life of charitable actions.¹⁰⁶ The emphasis on the widows links this episode very closely not only with the

99 Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:125, notes that this personalized and "attractive" presentation of Tabitha-Dorcas increases the pathos of the episode.

100 This is the only use of μαθήτρια in the New Testament.

101 Both miracles function as preparation for fruitful proclamation (9:35, 42), consistent with Luke's narrative pattern.

102 For Luke's tendency to use male-female pairings, see Luke 1:5–56 (Zechariah/Mary); 2:22–38 (Simeon/Anna); 4:33–39 (healings of man/woman); 8:1–3 (male/female disciples); 8:26–56 (healing of male demoniac/healing of a woman and girl); 15:3–10 (male/female owners of lost things); 18:1–14 (parables of widow/Pharisee and tax collector); 24:1–35 (resurrection appearances to women/men); Acts 2:17–18 (sons/daughters, male/female slaves).

103 Parsons, *Acts*, 139, says, "The problem of helpless Greek-speaking Jewish Christian widows resurfaces." On the fact that Luke almost certainly intends the reader to understand these widows as members of the Christian community, see Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 195–96.

104 Parsons, *Acts*, 138, notes the significance of Luke's emphasis on her *doing* good: "Tabitha is depicted as a benefactor, following the model of Jesus, whom Peter will later describe as one who went around 'doing good' (10:38)."

105 The emphasis on "doing" here is reminiscent of the fourfold repetition of ποιεῖν in Jesus' response to the lawyer in the narrative frame around the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25–37).

106 The garments the widows showed Peter as evidence of Tabitha-Dorcas' ministry may have been the actual clothes they were wearing at the time. Keener, *Acts* 2:1720, notes how this possibility increases the pathos of the scene. See also Pervo, *Acts*, 256.

story of widow-care in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1–6) but also with Jesus' life-restoring compassion for the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–17), who was dependent for support on her dead son as these widows seem to have been on Tabitha's benefaction.

With the Tabitha-Dorcas story, Luke continues to show that the ethos of generosity in his portrayal of the early church is not limited to the original Jerusalem community but extends to the other places where the gospel takes root. It is, for Luke, an essential characteristic of the followers of Jesus. The hints of boundary-crossing unity (a "Hebrew" believer cares for "Hellenistic" widows) also prepare the way for the more serious shattering of boundaries that will occur when Gentiles enter the community of faith (Acts 10).

1.6 *The Response to the Judean Famine (Acts 11:27–30)*

Following the Tabitha-Dorcas episode, Luke's focus stays on Peter's ministry in Caesarea and the Spirit-directed movement of the gospel beyond Judaism into the Gentile world (Acts 10:1–11:18). Then Luke backtracks chronologically to explain briefly the foundation of the Christian community in Antioch by "those scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen" (11:19; cf. 8:1).¹⁰⁷ He uses this flashback as a means to reintroduce Barnabas (sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem church, 11:22) and Saul (brought to Antioch by Barnabas, 11:26). Luke builds a picture of the believing community in Antioch as a center of mission and growth parallel to the Jerusalem church.¹⁰⁸

Within the portrait of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19–30), Luke narrates a brief episode that functions much like the summaries did for the Jerusalem community (11:27–30).¹⁰⁹ It illustrates the other-oriented attitude of believers toward possessions and wealth that characterizes the movement as a whole.¹¹⁰ The scene opens with prophets coming down from Jerusalem to Antioch (11:27). The Jerusalem church is providing something for the believers in Antioch, but

107 Dunn, *Acts*, 153, sees this manner of introducing the Antioch church as an indication of its importance to Luke: "Ironically, then, the playing down of the significance of the Antioch breakthrough attests Luke's appreciation of its importance. It was so important that it had to be securely interwoven into the history of the movement's steady expansion, and the revolutionary shift to the Gentiles validated beforehand by the critically scrutinized and divinely approved breakthrough at Caesarea."

108 Pervo, *Acts*, 290, comments: "Heretofore the narrative has moved around the axis of Jerusalem, including more or less adjacent regions. In 11:19–15:35, the axes will be Antioch and Jerusalem."

109 Parsons, *Acts*, 164, calls Acts 11:27–30 the "anticipatory" segment of a chain-link interlock (the "retrospective" segment is 12:1–24) that bridges the two halves of Acts.

110 Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:148, notes how Barnabas' presence links the generosity modeled in Jerusalem to this parallel in Antioch.

those roles will soon be reversed. Agabus, one of the visiting prophets, predicts a severe famine that is about to come “over all the world” (11:28). There is no mention of a request for action on the part of the Antioch church; nevertheless, their corporate response is immediate. Luke emphasizes that it is *disciples* who take action (11:29); out of their identity as Jesus’ followers, they choose radical generosity—preemptive generosity in the face of a need that has not yet happened.¹¹¹ In a collective and unified decision, they decide that each of them will participate “according to their ability” (καθὼς εὐπορεῖτό τις) to send help to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (11:29). This is *family* care, reminiscent of the summaries in Acts 2 and 4.¹¹² In the same way that Luke envisions the absence of social and ethnic dividing lines in the Christian community, we see here that he also views this new kinship as unlimited by geographical distance. It is notable that although the famine is predicted to affect “the whole world” (ἐφ’ ὅλην τὴν οἰκουμένην),¹¹³ which presumably includes Antioch, the disciples’ first response is not stockpiling for their own potential crisis but giving to meet the anticipated needs of others. The collection is sent “as service” (εἰς διακονίαν, 11:29), thus setting it in the same category as the apostolic preaching and widow-care of the Jerusalem church (6:1–4). The community dispatches the collection in the hands of their principal teachers, Barnabas and Saul,¹¹⁴ willing to part with them for the good of the believers in Jerusalem (11:30).

The new Christian community in Antioch, which will become the sending base for the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1–3), is presented by Luke as having the same ethos of generosity as the Jerusalem church. Possessions—and even cherished teachers—are held in a loose grasp, ready to be released as needs arise among believers. The community of those who follow Jesus continues to live in a way consistent with the ethic taught by him in the Gospel of Luke and modeled by the Jerusalem church in Acts 2–7.

111 Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 196, notes correctly that this generosity is directed explicitly for the care of fellow believers, even though presumably the famine would affect non-believers as well.

112 The common purse and the selling of goods to meet needs was internal to the community (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35).

113 In Luke 2:1, οἰκουμένη surely indicates “the Roman world,” given the way Luke circumscribes it within the confines of imperial control through the mention of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius the governor. For understanding the term here in the same way, see the discussions in Johnson, *Acts*, 205–206, and Witherington, *Acts*, 372–73.

114 For discussions of the relationship between this collection delivery and that described by Paul in Galatians 2:1ff, see Dunn, *Acts*, 158; Witherington, *Acts*, 374–75; and Keener, *Acts* 2:860–63.

1.7 *A Glimpse into Paul's Economic Ethic (Acts 20:33–35)*

After the introduction of the Antioch church (Acts 11:19–30), Luke provides a glimpse into the ongoing life of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12), with the stories of James' martyrdom, Peter's arrest, deliverance, and move to Caesarea, and Herod's death. The brief narrative return to Jerusalem concludes with another Lukan statement about the relentless advance of the gospel (12:24) and with the reintroduction of Barnabas and Saul (12:25). From this point onward in Acts, the center of missionary activity shifts definitively to Antioch and the narrative focus remains permanently on the ministry of Saul-Paul. Even when Jerusalem is the setting of subsequent episodes (15; 21:1–23:30), Paul remains the central figure.

Throughout the eight chapters that narrate Paul's missionary journeys (Acts 13–20), there is only one text that makes an explicit connection between the motif of wealth and possessions and the theme of right response.¹¹⁵ This brief, first-person teaching comes at the end of Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders (20:33–35).¹¹⁶ The final discourse of the apostle to these church leaders—and his only speech in Acts delivered to fellow believers—has to do with his personal modeling of an appropriate wealth ethic.¹¹⁷ As González points out, Luke believes and articulates through Paul that “the economic life of the Church is not a peripheral or secondary matter,”¹¹⁸ but central to the community's witness and mission. The economic ethic that the apostle has lived out before the believers includes both an appropriate *attitude* toward material possessions (“I did not covet,” 20:33) and an appropriate *action* (“I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions,” 20:34; cf. 28:30; 1 Cor 4:12; 9:15–18; 1 Thess 2:9).¹¹⁹ Paul grounds his example in the same

115 There are five pericopae in Acts 13–20 that draw implicit connections between reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions: 16:11–15; 16:16–24; 17:10–12; 19:11–20; 19:21–27. See below.

116 Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 254, makes the keen observation that for “much of Acts, Luke is content to reinforce his wealth ethics through narrative, describing how they correspond to the teachings of Jesus in the way they structure their community life and support the spread of the gospel.... Only in Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders do we catch a final, fleeting glimpse of overt prescription, and even there, it is grounded in the teaching of Jesus.”

117 That Paul's work ethic involved an intentional example to be imitated is clear from the wording of 20:35a: “All this I have shown you because by such work it is necessary to help the weak” (πάντα ὑπέδειξα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὕτως κοπιώντας δεῖ ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῶν ἀσθενούντων, my translation).

118 González, *Acts*, 239.

119 Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:47, says that “Paul's practice of working and earning may seem a long way from the community of goods in Jerusalem, but it represents a new application of Jesus' teaching to the situation of church leaders who might claim community

over-arching approach to money that has been the consistent thread throughout Acts: material gain is never exclusively for one's own use, but for the good of the other.¹²⁰ In a move that is both theologically and rhetorically effective,¹²¹ Luke has Paul substantiate this approach by grounding it in a dominical logion: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Though the exact wording of this beatitude is not found in the Gospels, it is quite similar in message to Luke 6:35–38, with its emphasis on the superabundant blessings experienced by those who give generously; it also aligns perfectly with the reversal of the regnant reciprocity ethic that was observed in the dominical teachings throughout the Third Gospel.¹²² I agree with Marshall that the overall sense of the logion paired with Paul's example here is completely consistent with what Luke has been indicating throughout his two volumes concerning the use of material resources.¹²³

1.8 *Initial Conclusions about Luke's Wealth Ethic in Acts*

Throughout his Gospel, Luke drew close connections between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions, making clear that there were definite economic dimensions to following Jesus. Thus far in our examination of Luke's second volume, we have seen eight passages that make those same kinds of connections in an explicit way. These texts range across both the Jerusalem section of the book (Acts 1–7) and the Samaritan-Gentile expansion section (Acts 8–20). In a sense, all of Acts deals with what "right response" to Jesus looks like in corporate form, and Luke consistently portrays a corporate life of deep concern for the needy that overflows in radical hospitality and a loose hold on private ownership. In the Jerusalem unit, Luke weaves together strategically placed summaries of community life and narrative episodes that illustrate the economic ethos of the community. Through the careful alternation of narratives and summaries in Acts 1–7, Luke reveals his understanding that the Christian community's Spirit-empowered proclamation and its effective witness are inextricably

support. It is motivated by the same wholehearted devotion to the welfare of others that characterized the Jerusalem church."

120 Steve Walton, "Primitive Communism," 110, sees here a clear echo of the ethos of the Lukan summaries in Paul's expressed beliefs and practices.

121 Keener, *Acts* 3:3063, observes that "Acts, like Paul's letters, does not regularly cite Jesus, but sometimes it does cite him at strategic points (such as in the climax here; likewise, the climactic citation of 11:16)."

122 See, e.g., Luke 14:1–24. See also Witherington, *Acts*, 626–27, and Keener, *Acts* 3:3064–66.

123 "It is better for a person who can do so to give to help others rather than to amass further wealth for himself." Marshall, *Acts*, 336.

linked to its reciprocity-reversing generosity and its boundary-breaking hospitality. This ready responsiveness to the poor, entirely consistent with what we have seen of the ministry and message of Jesus in the Third Gospel,¹²⁴ is characteristic not only of Luke's portrait of the original Christian community in Jerusalem, but also characterizes his view of the churches that spring up beyond Jerusalem in his story (e.g., the disciples in Joppa, 9:36–43; the Antioch church, 11:27–30). When the church in Acts moves beyond Jerusalem, whether in Jewish or Hellenistic contexts, the ethos of mutuality and generosity remains the same. In the episodes examined from Acts 8–20, Luke shows how the gospel confronts the wealthy and wealth-seekers (e.g., Simon Magus, 8:4–24) with a stark choice between loyalty to God and loyalty to Mammon; he also continues to insist that all disciples of Jesus (i.e., right responders) live with a loose hold on material possessions, which are readily released to meet the needs of others.

2 Implicit Links between Reversal and Right Response and the Motif of Wealth and Possessions in Acts

In addition to the eight pericopae already examined, there are six other passages strategically placed across Acts that make indirect or implicit links between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. Analysis of these passages will show Luke's consistent view that a deep concern for the poor and boundary-less mutuality are essential elements of Christian community.

2.1 *The Healing of a Lame Man (Acts 3:1–10)*

Immediately after the first summary of community life (Acts 2:42–47), there is a scene in which the generous spirit of Jesus' followers is demonstrated as responsiveness to a needy person outside the community (3:1–10). This is the first narrative sequence post-Pentecost, so it occupies an important place in the development of Luke's story.¹²⁵ "Gold and silver"—and expectations about them as the typical form of almsgiving—play a pivotal role in the story. The scene begins at the "Beautiful Gate" of the temple and then moves into the temple

¹²⁴ See Chapter 3.

¹²⁵ See Dunn, *Acts*, 39. This episode also plays a parallel role to that of Jesus' healing of a paralytic man right after calling his first disciples (Luke 5:17–26). The most striking difference is that Jesus heals in his own authority; Peter heals the man in the name of Jesus. In both accounts, the issue of "authority to heal" provokes conflict with the religious leaders.

itself,¹²⁶ as a man's identity is reversed through the power of Jesus' name: he goes from a "lame beggar" lying outside the temple courts (3:2, 10),¹²⁷ to a walking, leaping worshipper of God within the temple precincts (3:8, 9). The first half of the story focuses on the man's condition—lame, utterly dependent on others¹²⁸—and his expectation of alms (ἐλεημοσύνη) from worshippers (3:2, 3). Luke seems to indicate a dramatic crossing of paths on that particular day—the man is being brought to his spot at the Beautiful Gate just as Peter and John are about to enter it.

Three things about Peter's response to the beggar are noteworthy. First, Peter commands the man to look at them (Acts 3:4). Luke has just said that the man is already looking at them, so Peter's imperative must be asking for special attention—and perhaps this attentiveness is also what Luke is asking of the reader, because the customary almsgiving narrative is about to take an unexpected turn. Second, Peter correctly assesses what the man wants (silver and gold, 3:6). Even though the apostle states that he has none of that material wealth,¹²⁹ his response to the man is still a model of generosity: "What I do have, this I give to you" (my translation). Given the immediate context of the Lukan summary of generous use of possessions and the whole scope of Jesus' urging to generous almsgiving in the Gospel, the reader can assume that if Peter had silver and gold at his disposal, he would also share that with the man. Third, the apostle's own material poverty not only does not prohibit an orientation of generosity toward the man, but it also opens the door for the kind of help that goes far beyond the man's own expectations. The gift that Peter gives truly reflects the radical generosity just described in the summary—he meets a real needy person and offers him a complete and compassionate reversal of his need. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," Peter commands, "stand up and walk!"¹³⁰ And with that single imperative gift, the man's existence is transformed.

126 Luke mentions the temple six times in 10 verses, emphasizing the significance of this miracle's setting (Acts 3:1, 2 [2×], 3, 8, 10).

127 "The location of the lame man at the threshold of the temple enclosure suggests that the authorial audience would have inferred from this reference that the man was socially ostracized, lying, as it were, 'outside' the boundaries of institutional religion." Parsons, *Acts*, 57.

128 The crippled man is not active, except in begging; all other actions are done for him by others (see the passives, "he was being carried" and "they would put him," Acts 3:2).

129 Peter's words are literally: "Silver and gold do not belong to me" (οὐχ ὑπάρχει μοι). Pervo, *Acts*, 100, calls this "an elegant dative of possession," which "assures readers that the apostles do not have community funds at their personal disposal."

130 "Peter and John, like Jesus before them (Luke 5:17–26), and Paul who will follow them (Acts 14:8–18), command the lame to walk, confirming and extending the programmatic ministry of Jesus (Luke 7:22)." Parsons, *Acts*, 54.

This episode highlights the radical reversal and restoration of human beings that Luke sees being brought by the gospel, as the man is transformed from passive dependence and a state of exclusion into active response and inclusion.¹³¹ And although the story is not “about” wealth and possessions per se, the lame man also illustrates Luke’s understanding of the limitations of a life whose perspective fixed on “mammon”; had the man’s expectations of “silver and gold” been met, it would have merely extended to him one more day of existence trapped in his lameness. What Jesus offered him, through the apostles, was permanent liberation that was not available through money. And, in typical Lukan fashion,¹³² the healed man’s praise and the amazement of the onlookers pave the way for powerful proclamation of the message of Jesus (3:12–4:23).

2.2 *The Conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:11–15)*

After the healing of the lame man, Luke continues to highlight the distinctive economic practices of the church, with various passages in the Jerusalem and Samaria section of Acts making explicit connections between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions.¹³³ In the Gentile section of Acts, there are several passages that make Luke’s point in a more indirect way. Three of those are set within the narrative of Paul’s Macedonian mission: the conversion of Lydia (16:11–15), the spiritual liberation of a slave girl (16:16–24), and the conversion of wealthy people in Berea (17:10–12).

Paul’s first stop after receiving the “Macedonian call” (Acts 16:9) is Philippi, “a leading city of the district” (16:12). There seems not to have been an established Jewish community in Philippi, since the missionaries’ first target location is not a synagogue but a “place of prayer” outside the city gates along the river,¹³⁴ and their chosen audience is not Jewish men but worshipping women (16:13).¹³⁵ Rather than a formal presentation, it appears that Paul and his team simply sit and converse with those who have gathered by the river

131 His response of joy, embodied in his walking, leaping, and praising, is paradigmatic of those in the Gospel who are transformed by the liberating power of Jesus (cf. Luke 17:18–19; also see Mary’s words in the Magnificat, Luke 1:46–48).

132 For the miracle + praise and amazement + proclamation pattern, see, e.g., Luke 4:31–37; 5:17–26; 9:37–43; 18:35–43.

133 See the first half of this chapter.

134 On the possibility that the Jews in Philippi were not permitted to congregate within the city limits, see Barrett, *Acts* 2:780–82.

135 As Justo González keenly observes: “There is a measure of irony in this story. The Spirit sent Paul a vision of a man, and what he found in Philippi was a group of women!” *The Story Luke Tells: Luke’s Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 57.

to pray. Luke introduces “a certain woman” named Lydia (τις γυνή ὀνόματι Λυδία, 16:14),¹³⁶ and in rapid succession offers five pieces of information about her. First, she is a seller of purple cloth (a luxury item), which sets her within the merchant class.¹³⁷ Second, she is from the city of Thyatira. Third, she is a worshiper of the Jewish God (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν).¹³⁸ Fourth, she is listening to the missionaries’ speech, probably on repeated occasions.¹³⁹ Fifth, in response to her initially positive disposition, God opens her heart to pay close attention to Paul’s words. Luke passes over the details of her conversion, moving immediately to her baptism—and that of her household, suggesting that she is the head of that household (16:15).¹⁴⁰ Her first post-baptism act is a gesture of generous hospitality: she urges the missionaries to stay in her home. The later mention of gatherings of believers in her home (16:40) indicates that her generous hospitality was persistent and offered to the Christian community as a whole,¹⁴¹ reflecting the ethos of the Lukan summaries (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–35).¹⁴²

136 That Lydia is identified by a personal name, rather than by her family name, suggests “she is a person of some status, since it was normal in such a Greco-Roman setting *not* to mention women by personal name in public unless they were either notable or notorious.” Witherington, *Acts*, 492 (emphasis original). On the possibility that “Lydia” was not her given name but a nickname given to her as an outsider by Philippian residents (i.e., “the Lydian woman,” since Thyatira is in the regions of Lydia), see Bruce, *Acts*, 314.

137 For a detailed discussion of female business owners in the first-century Mediterranean world, see Keener, *Acts*, 3:2397–99.

138 Luke calls Lydia a “worshiper” of God rather than a “God-fearer” (as in the case of Cornelius), so it is difficult to discern her exact relationship to Judaism—sympathizer, proselyte, or even Jewish by birth? There was a Jewish community in Thyatira, her hometown (see Dunn, *Acts*, 219), but that does not eliminate or confirm any of the possibilities. Luke’s previous mention of an entire household being baptized was clearly in a Gentile setting (Cornelius’ household, Acts 10:48) and Lydia’s story is followed by the conversion of another Gentile household (that of the Philippian jailer, 16:33), so there are strong contextual hints that Lydia is a Gentile. However, Luke does mention once the conversion of an entire Jewish household (18:8), so, again, either possibility is present within the narrative of Acts. Given the context of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles in Macedonia, I lean towards understanding Lydia as a Gentile sympathizer or “God-fearer” like Cornelius, but such conclusions must be held lightly given the ambiguous nature of the evidence.

139 The imperfect tense of the verb suggests ongoing or repeated listening.

140 There is no mention of a husband or a father who legitimates her decisions to be baptized and to invite; she acts autonomously, as the head of household (τὸν οἶκόν μου, emphasis added). See Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tydale, 1951), 314.

141 Tannehill, *Narrative Unity* 2:196, observes that the references to Lydia and her household (16:14, 40) form a frame around the Philippi episodes, demonstrating Luke’s interest in her role as patroness and hostess for the newly formed church.

142 “As always, Luke connects spiritual dispositions to the disposition of possessions.” Johnson, *Acts*, 297.

In Lydia, Luke provides an embodied illustration of right response by a person of economic means, as she adopts the ethos of generosity and hospitality that characterizes disciples of Jesus.

2.3 *The Exorcism that Releases a Slave Girl (Acts 16:16–24)*

Immediately on the heels of Lydia's conversion, Luke recounts a tale of liberation and reversal with strong economic undertones. This is not so much a story about the life of discipleship in relationship to money; rather, it reveals the effects of the gospel's liberating power to confront and overturn economic systems and practices that enslave human beings and reduce them to means for the accumulation of wealth.¹⁴³

After their meeting with a generous woman of significant economic means, Paul and his companions' next narrated encounter in Philippi is also with a woman. This time she is a "slave girl" (παῖδίσκη), an anonymous young woman under the control of two depersonalizing masters: a "spirit of divination" (πνεῦμα πύθωνα) and her "owners," for whom her fortune-telling was a source of "a great deal of money" (ἐργασίαν πολλήν). As Johnson notes, "The mention of profit-taking places these religious merchandisers with others in Luke's narrative whose wickedness is connected to avarice."¹⁴⁴ When Paul speaks a commanding word of departure (ἐξέλθειν) to the spirit and liberates the girl from its power (16:18), the immediate response of her "owners" is not rejoicing over a human being's freedom and health, but anger over the corresponding departure (ἐξήλθεν) of their hope of future income (16:19).¹⁴⁵

This episode highlights the great reversal brought about by the gospel, as an enslaved, powerless young woman is released from captivity. Her release and that of the lame beggar (Acts 3:1–10) are realizations of the liberating promises made by Jesus in Nazareth (Luke 4:18–30). The release of the slave girl also emphasizes the enslaving power of mammon, in a way strongly reminiscent of Luke's Gospel.¹⁴⁶ The fact that Luke is highlighting a "power encounter"

143 As Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 215, says, "The combination of divination and moneymaking draws the narrative into the purview of our topic."

144 Johnson, *Acts*, 294. See Luke 12:21; 16:1–9, 16, 19–26; Acts 1:16–21; 5:1–11; 8:18–24.

145 "The vanquishing of the pythonic spirit is a tear in the basic fabric of pagan popular religion in that it demonstrates publicly the weakness of the pagan πνεῦμα in the face of the missionaries and their message. Inasmuch as such religious life was woven together with material gain, such a tear means the unraveling of mantic-based economics as well." Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 26.

146 As Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 216–17, puts it: "The narrative is a dramatic juxtaposition between *attestation to Jesus* and *the alliance of divination, money, and imperial order*. In the contest between the two, the narrative makes clear that the power of Jesus—against the demon who possessed the slave-girl, against the imperial order, and against

between the force of the gospel and the force of mammon is underlined by the recurring issue of authority in the passage. The verb form of “command” occurs twice (Acts 16:18, 23) and the noun once (16:24).¹⁴⁷ But it is only Paul’s command, given in the name of Jesus (like Peter’s in Acts 3:6), that is truly effective. Paul speaks in Jesus’ name with Jesus’ authority and the demon flees. When civil and religious “authorities” speak a command (to throw the missionaries into prison), that word is completely overturned by God in the next episode (16:16–40). It is no accident that this power struggle occurs in the context of a threat to prevailing economic patterns and interests.¹⁴⁸

2.4 *The Conversion of Wealthy People in Berea (Acts 17:10–12)*

When Paul and Silas leave Philippi after their release from prison, they encounter overt hostility in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9), so they move on for a brief stay in Berea. The indirect link between this episode and the motif of wealth and possessions is Luke’s careful insistence on the elite socio-economic status of the “right responders” in Berea. Where the NRSV characterizes the Bereans as “more receptive” to the apostles’ message than the Thessalonians, the Greek adjective can also mean “nobler” or “of better birth” (εὐγενέστεροι, 17:11).¹⁴⁹ Translations that emphasize openness to the message are supported by the behaviors Luke catalogues: “they were receiving the word with goodwill or enthusiasm” and “they were evaluating daily” (my translation) the correspondence between the Scriptures and the apostolic message (17:11). However, the underlying note of “nobility” remains present and is intensified by the summary statement: “Many of them believed, and from the Greeks, distinguished women (γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσχημόνων) and not a few men.”¹⁵⁰ In this episode, Luke highlights the theme of right response to the gospel as careful consideration leading to faith. The right responders are from the high-status

the moneymakers—is decisive and truthful in triumph.... Money and all that is linked to it is here devalued and relativized in society by the power of Jesus on the lips of Paul” (emphasis original).

147 Παραγγέλλω (16:18); παραγγείλαντες (16:23); παραγγέλαν (16:24).

148 Bruce notes that “the only occasions on which Luke reports an attack by Gentiles on Christian missionaries arise from a threat (real or imagined) presented by the gospel to property interests.” *Acts* (1988), 314, n. 54.

149 Bruce, *Acts* (1951), 328, says: “Although εὐγενής originally refers to nobility of birth, it came to denote those qualities which were expected in people so born, in the same way as Eng. ‘noble.’”

150 My translation. I agree with Johnson, González, and Pervo that the sentence construction indicates that the descriptor, τῶν εὐσχημόνων, applies only (or at least primarily) to the women. See Johnson, *Acts*, 308; González, *Acts*, 199; and Pervo, *Acts*, 416, 422. For a different perspective, see Witherington, *Acts*, 509, n. 171, and Parsons, *Acts*, 238.

segments of Berean society. These “distinguished” people, like Lydia in Philippi (16:11–15) and Zacchaeus in the Gospel (Luke 19:1–10), illustrate the “possible impossibility” (Luke 18:27) of wealthy persons entering the kingdom of God.

2.5 *Magic, Book Burning, and Riots in Ephesus (Acts 19:11–27)*

The next two episodes both take place in Ephesus and will be treated together here. Both situations are similar to the story of the exorcism in Philippi, as they focus not so much on the role of money and possessions within the community life of the church as on the liberating effect of the gospel when it comes into conflict with economic systems and practices that enslave human beings. The first story deals with the gospel’s impact on the lucrative practice of magic (Acts 19:11–20),¹⁵¹ while the second highlights the challenge the Christian message poses to those who accumulate wealth in the idol-making trade (19:21–27).

As we have seen, Luke often emphasizes the interrelationship between “word” (proclamation of the message about Jesus) and “deed” (miracles). That emphasis is present in Luke’s narrative of Paul’s time in Ephesus, where the daily proclamation of the gospel (19:8–10) was confirmed by extraordinary miracles (19:11, 12).¹⁵² In a cultural setting where the manipulation and acquisition of power through magic was a deeply engrained and highly profitable business,¹⁵³ there were inevitable attempts to “harness” for personal gain the observable power of Jesus’ name.¹⁵⁴ The seven sons of Sceva attempt this acquisition (19:14–16), in a move similar to that of Simon Magus (8:4–25); instead, they are completely mastered by the “sarcastic demon” they fail to exorcise.¹⁵⁵ This demonstration of the superiority of Jesus’ name and the genuine authority attached to it results in general fear among the populace, accompanied by praise for God’s name. Among those who were already believers in Ephesus, it results in a radical breaking of bondage to magical practices, displayed by

151 For a discussion of magic as part of the Ephesian cultural-religious landscape in the first century, see Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 41–43.

152 Parsons, Acts, 269, puts it this way: “As in the portrayal of Philip, Paul’s healing ministry (19:11–12; cf. 8:6–7; also 5:15) confirms his message regarding the ‘kingdom of God’ (19:8) and, as in the story of Philip, is one of the ways Luke distinguishes the mighty works of God from the activities of Satan.”

153 Thus, Paul’s lack of interest in profit “is probably to be taken as at least part of the background” of the Ephesus narrative. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 150.

154 The sons of Sceva “were participants in a highly competitive business, the demands of which required them to introduce the name of ‘that Jesus proclaimed by Paul’ into their therapeutic formulae.” Pervo, *Acts*, 477.

155 González’ apt description of the evil spirit’s response to the attempted exorcism in Jesus’ name by people who did not belong to Jesus. *Acts*, 222.

burning magic books worth 50,000 silver coins.¹⁵⁶ With this radical act of divestiture, the new disciples demonstrate their praise of the Lord Jesus and their refusal of any other master (in this case, the system of magic that was intertwined with wealth in Ephesus). The divine approbation of this declaration of exclusive loyalty is seen in Luke's summary statement: "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prospered" (19:20).

In that context of growth and genuine power and authority, the silversmiths' union rises up, led by a man named Demetrius. Preparing his fellow artisans to take a complaint to the authorities, Demetrius frames the issue in terms of honor, both for themselves and for their goddess: "And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned" (Acts 19:27). But in the preceding verses he has already made clear that honor is simply a pretext; the real cause of Demetrius' alarm is the threat to their substantial earnings.¹⁵⁷ Luke calls their silver idol business one of "no small profit" (οὐκ ὀλίγην ἐργασίαν, 19:24), and Demetrius himself characterizes it as one that produces prosperity (τῆς ἐργασίας ἡ εὐπορία, 19:25).¹⁵⁸ The growth and prevailing power of "the word of the Lord" in Ephesus (19:20) was liberating people from captivity to the dark forces behind magic and idol worship, including the economic powers bound up in both systems. There is a striking contrast between the silversmith episode and the previous one: the "right responders" in Ephesus gave up costly items, described by their value in silver,¹⁵⁹ thereby demonstrating their loyalty to the Lord Jesus; the artisans clung to silver images and silver profits, thus showing their loyalty to the lordship of mammon.

2.6 *The Hospitality and Generosity of Publius and the Maltese Islanders* (Acts 28:7–10)

The very last episode in Acts before the Roman epilogue (Acts 28:11–31) is a picture of generous hospitality on the island of Malta (28:7–10). It is a miracle story (28:8–9), framed by two expressions of hospitality. Prior to the miracle, Luke

¹⁵⁶ Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 153, notes correctly that the mention of the great value of the books probably highlights that "over against the Spirit-empowered exorcism, considerable amounts of money were involved for those who practiced magical exorcism."

¹⁵⁷ Pervo, *Acts*, 486, makes a keen observation about Demetrius rhetorical tactic: "Into the basic ingredient of economic grievance he poured a measure of patriotism and topped the cocktail with a garnish of religion."

¹⁵⁸ The economic impact of the gospel in the pagan culture of the Empire was significant. Dunn, *Acts*, 261, observes that "sixty years later the younger Pliny records the devastation of the old cults by the success of Christianity in Bithynia (*Letters* 10.96)."

¹⁵⁹ On Luke's use of "silver" to connect the two stories, see Keener, *Acts* 3:2859.

tells the reader of the generous hospitality of Publius, the “leading man of the island” (28:7).¹⁶⁰ Publius shares generous hospitality with Paul and the other shipwreck victims for three days. In response to the healing, the people of the island share generous hospitality with the travelers, bestowing many honors (πολλαῖς τιμαῖς)¹⁶¹ on them during the rest of their stay and meeting their needs (τὰ πρὸς τὰς χρείας) for the journey to Rome (28:10). Though nothing is said of their conversion, the hospitality they demonstrate has been a characteristic of right response to Jesus and his message throughout Luke-Acts.¹⁶²

One effect of the gospel is that generous hospitality is no longer the exclusive province of the elite; indeed, the islanders’ provision for the visitors over many months exceeds the three days of hospitality extended by Publius. As seen at the beginning of Acts in the summaries of the Jerusalem church, so at the end—generous hospitality and the meeting of needs are, in Luke’s perspective, essential characteristics of right response to the gospel message.

2.7 *Further Conclusions from Acts*

The second half of this chapter has examined six passages in Acts that carry indirect or implicit connections between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. The radical reversal required and made possible by the gospel is seen most clearly in these texts through the transformation of people’s lives—a lame man becomes a walking, leaping worshiper; a demon-possessed slave girl becomes a free woman; those enthralled by the power of magic become voluntary subjects of the Lord Jesus. This same reversal of captivity also manifests itself in the overturning of economic systems and practices (e.g., magic and idolatry) that enslave human beings. Right response to the word of the Lord is linked with hospitality and generous disposition of resources to meet the needs of others (e.g., Lydia and the Maltese islanders). Although these stories do not shine a direct spotlight on Luke’s understanding of the wealth ethic of the Christian community,

160 It is not clear whether Luke intends by “leading man” (lit, “the first man”) the top Roman official or the wealthiest man on the island, or both. Publius’ considerable economic capability is certainly indicated by his provision of three days of hospitality to Paul and his companions. See Keener’s discussion, *Acts* 3:3681–84.

161 Luke uses τιμή elsewhere to refer to material benefits; see especially Acts 4:34 and 5:2–3, where it appears in the descriptions of proper (Jerusalem church) and improper (Ananias and Sapphira) Christian disposition of material possessions.

162 Luke does not specify that Paul “proclaimed the gospel” to the Maltese islanders, but given the patterns of Paul’s ministry in every place he went in Acts plus Luke’s typical pairing of miracles with proclamation, it is a safe assumption that he did so and that at least some of them believed.

nevertheless the same Lukan concerns and expectations are present in indirect and implicit ways.

3 So, What about Acts and the Patterns Revealed in Luke's Gospel?

The question asked at the beginning of this chapter was: Does the Lukan perspective on wealth and possessions that was expressed in the Gospel remain consistent throughout his second volume? The examination of pertinent passages in Acts has shown a clearly affirmative answer to that question. Of the five emphases seen in Luke's Gospel, four are also consistently visible in Acts, and the fifth is woven implicitly into the fabric of the narrative:

First, although not couched in "leaving and following" language as it was in the Gospel, there is nonetheless in Acts a strong pattern of disciples (i.e., right responders) abandoning traditional sources of security and identity, including financial resources. This is seen in general terms in Luke's descriptions of the Christian communities as places where private ownership is held lightly and readily sacrificed for the common good; it is particularized in persons like Barnabas, Tabitha-Dorcas, Lydia, and the Maltese islanders.

Second, Acts clearly confirms that the "leaving and following" nature of discipleship applies to *all* believers, not just to apostles or "specialists." In fact, Luke consistently emphasizes that it is the community as a whole as well as ordinary people within it, whether in Jerusalem or elsewhere, that practice the "leaving" of proprietary wealth and security in favor of generous mutuality.

Third, the kingdom values that Jesus modeled for his disciples in the Gospel, including the reversal of the practices of social and economic reciprocity, are deeply and broadly present in Acts, not least in the boundary-less table fellowship that characterizes the early Christian communities. And the clear line that was drawn in the Gospel concerning loyalty and lordship (i.e., will you serve God or mammon?) is seen as well in Acts, both positively in cases like that of Barnabas, and negatively in examples like those of Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, and the owners of the slave girl. The vocabulary is different in Acts, as Luke abandons "mammon" and "wealth" vocabulary in favor of "profit" and "goods," but the focus remains the same: people must choose who or what will have their loyalty and the governance of their lives.

Fourth, analysis of the Third Gospel shows a clearly-defined divine will for economic surplus—it is destined for a charity that includes almsgiving but surpasses it through identification with the poor in barrier-less community, expressed especially through inclusive table fellowship. Luke portrays the early

church practicing this kind of disposition of material goods, from the care of widows and the needy in the Jerusalem churches to the collection in the Antioch church on behalf of brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.¹⁶³ The Lukan descriptions of these practices are matter-of-fact, leaving the reader with the impression that, in Luke's perspective, the practices he is describing should not be extraordinary but typical of all communities of Jesus' followers.

The fifth conclusion drawn from the Gospel concerned Luke's use of poor-rich vocabulary: Luke's use of "poor" is polyvalent, but "rich" is always used as an economic categorization with consistent negative connotations for discipleship. Two things can be said about this in the context of Acts. First, the *πτωχός-πλούσιος* word pair that was so prevalent in volume one is missing in Acts.¹⁶⁴ "Poor" is replaced by words like "needy" (*ἐνδεής*) or embodied in lame persons, widows, slaves, and famine victims;¹⁶⁵ rich people in Acts are referred to as "persons of high standing" or by titles that convey their prestigious status. Second, the picture of these wealthy people is more nuanced in Acts than it was in the Gospel. Some wealthy individuals (e.g., Lydia, Cornelius) demonstrate a

163 Sondra Wheeler summarizes well Luke's vision of the divine will for material wealth: "The ordinary function of possessions—to ensure status and power and invulnerability over against others—are all excluded. Possessions become useful and acceptable within the Christian community exactly insofar as they become dispensable to their possessors, and thus available for dispersal as the material needs of others, or the spiritual needs of their erstwhile owners, make it expedient." Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 72.

164 Various explanations are given for this disappearance of poor-rich language in Acts. Steven Friesen typifies social-scientific perspectives, seeing in Acts a "charity model" (i.e., almsgiving) that demonstrates little or no interest in reversing institutional causes of poverty and relegates "redistribution" to an idealized past. Friesen, "Injustice or God's Will," 26–27. S. John Roth, reading Luke-Acts theologically, sees Christology as the reason for the disappearance of rich-poor vocabulary in Luke's second volume: "Jesus is no longer God's earthly eschatological agent of salvation. In Acts, Jesus is the risen and ascended Lord.... [The apostles] are not characterized by programmatic ministries to the captive, the shattered, the blind, the deaf mute, the lame, lepers, the maimed, the dead, and the poor—various healing episodes in Acts notwithstanding—because the apostles are not 'the coming one.'" Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor*, 220–21. I believe, however, that a narrative reading of Acts effectively counters these proposals, we have seen. The ethos of the Gospel's mandates about wealth and possessions is lived out on the pages of Acts, whether the vocabulary is present or not.

165 While Luke's second volume "does not use the word *ptochos*, we do find that the alienation of wealth in favor of others is a feature of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 2:45; 4:34–35; 6:1), and was practiced by Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 4, 31). Moreover, the alleviation of those suffering because of famine is noted in Acts 11:28–30, and Paul's collection is mentioned in Acts 24:17." Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16–30)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 177.

right response to the word of Jesus, manifested in their generosity and hospitality; like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10), they realize the “possible impossibility” that rich people can enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:25). Other wealthy persons (or wealth-seekers) in Acts demonstrate a wrong response (e.g., Simon Magus, the slave girl’s owners, the silversmiths). Thus, we see that despite the disappearance in Acts of the poor-rich language that was present in paradigmatic texts in Luke,¹⁶⁶ the Gospel’s consistent interest in those categories and their relationship to discipleship persists in Acts.

In conclusion, Luke’s second volume paints a picture of disciples and discipleship that is entirely consistent with what was seen in the Gospel.¹⁶⁷ A right response to Jesus in both volumes requires a loosening of the believer’s hold on material possessions; a new dependence on Jesus as the source of the disciples’ security will result in a deep commitment to meeting the needs of the poor. The new community, bearing Jesus’ name and empowered by his Holy Spirit, is characterized by behaviors and attitudes that reject an ethic of reciprocity and welcome the poor and outsiders through boundary-less unity, expressed particularly in inclusive table fellowship.

¹⁶⁶ E.g., the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), the Nazareth sermon (Luke 4:18–19), the beatitudes and woes (Luke 6:20–26), the response to John the Baptist (Luke 7:18–23).

¹⁶⁷ With Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics*, 190, who argues that “the ethical teachings of Acts are actually well in keeping with the Gospel’s directives.”

Reviewing the Journey and Asking Further Questions

1 Reviewing the Journey

This study began with a point of curiosity coupled with an admission. The question was curiosity whether Luke, particularly in his Gospel volume, has a consistent ethical and theological stance toward the matter of wealth and possessions. Even a casual reader of Luke's work will notice a keen and persistent interest in economic matters. However, is there a constant, unifying thread in the Lukan texts that address those issues? The admission that followed hard on the heels of this point of curiosity was that this is hardly a new or startling question in Lukan studies! The literature on the subject is vast and multi-layered, with attempts made to answer the question from a variety of critical approaches—historical, redaction-critical, sociological, and literary.

This study rests on the presupposition that, despite the mountain of scholarship devoted to the topic, Luke's richly textured work still offers fruitful territory to be explored. A narrative approach was selected for the exploration of the topic, as the best way to allow Luke's story itself to respond to the question of his perspective on wealth and possessions. However, even among the narrative studies of Luke-Acts that have proliferated in the past two decades,¹ there have been many different entry points into the topic. For this study the chosen entry point was Luke's introductory unit (1:5–4:44). The project developed in four stages.

In Chapter 1, we surveyed and summarized narrative approaches to the question of Luke's wealth ethic, paying particular attention to the various points in the Gospel where narrative critics have located Luke's paradigmatic text on wealth and possessions: the Magnificat and the Nazareth sermon,² the parables of the central section of the Gospel,³ or the mandate for radical renunciation in Luke 14:33.⁴ Our proposal is that the hermeneutical key is to be found, not in a single passage or cluster of passages, but rather in the entirety of Luke's

¹ See the discussion in Chapter 1.

² Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

³ James A. Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth in Luke's Travel Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁴ Christopher M. Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

carefully-crafted introduction to the Gospel. This includes the Magnificat and the Nazareth sermon but is broader than those two poetic-prophetic passages.

An issue that had to be resolved prior to analyzing the features and function of the hermeneutical key provided by Luke's introduction was the precise scope of that introduction. While there is critical consensus that Luke has provided an introductory unit, beginning immediately after the formal prologue (Luke 1:5), and that this introduction is designed to shape in some way the reader's understanding of what follows, there is no parallel consensus, even among narrative interpreters, about the end point of the Gospel's introduction. Three major perspectives on the scope of Luke's introduction were examined, all of which situate the terminus prior to the end of Luke 4. The strengths and weaknesses of each position were analyzed and evaluated; then, using the work of Fearghus Ó Fearghail,⁵ a case was made for seeing the scope of the Gospel's paradigmatic introductory unit as Luke 1:5–4:44. This entire unit provides the interpretive lens for reading the rest of Luke's Gospel, including his perspective on wealth and possessions.

Once the boundaries of the introduction were established, Chapter 2 presented a narrative analysis of the pericopae in Luke 1–4. Since the Lukan introduction provides a hermeneutical lens for the reader, it was important to discern how the motif of wealth and possessions is presented in that narrative unit. The clues that Luke provides in the introduction and the expectations he raises, which guide the reader's interaction with the Lukan wealth ethic in the rest of the Gospel, show that the motif of wealth and possessions is linked to two Lukan themes.

First, for Luke, the motif of wealth and possessions is intimately connected with the Lukan theme of *reversal*, which is a principal way that God's saving work is presented in the introductory unit. It is clear that Luke sees some kind of upheaval taking place in human existence as the salvation of God is realized in the person of Jesus. At least part of that disturbance of the status quo has to do with economic issues. This point is expressed most straightforwardly in the Magnificat's images of the powerful brought down, the lowly lifted up, the hungry fed, and the rich sent away empty (Luke 1:52–53), and in the Nazareth sermon's good news to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (4:18). The theme also runs as a subtle thread through the entire Lukan introduction, as God bypasses the powerful, wealthy elite to announce his new work in Jesus to the lowliest members of Palestinian society (women, shepherds, and poor people).

5 Fearghus Ó Fearghail, *The Introduction to Luke-Acts: A Study of the Role of Luke 1:5–4:44 in the Composition of Luke's Two-Volume Work* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1991).

Second, in addition to linking the motif of wealth and possessions to the theme of reversal, Luke also ties the motif closely to the theme of *right response*. The introduction draws a series of portraits of faithful responders, all of whom are representatives of the poor, the lowly, and the despised (women, the shepherds, Simeon, crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers). Those who respond positively to God's new work are either economically poor or status-poor, or both. The representatives of the elite in Luke's introductory unit (Herod, Caesar, Quirinius, and Pilate) are simply left on the margins of the narrative, peripheral to the action of the story.

These two themes—reversal and right response—shape Luke's introductory portrait of God's saving work, highlighting both the divine and human sides of the in-breaking kingdom. Reversal—including the reversal of economic practices that exclude and oppress human beings—is what God accomplishes in Jesus; right response is the human welcoming of that saving work. Together, the two themes threaded through the introduction provide the interpretive lens through which to read the remainder of the Third Gospel's portrait of wealth and possessions. As the reader proceeds to the body of the Gospel, he or she expects that the work of God in Jesus will continue to bring a visible and happy reversal for the poor and lowly, and that this work will find a welcoming response among them. In regard to the wealthy, the Lukan introduction offers an ambiguous set of expectations that nevertheless shade towards a negative assessment. The only explicit claims made about the rich and powerful are the Magnificat's note that reversal will touch them in drastic ways; there is also an implicitly negative presentation of them through their non-inclusion in the group of those who welcome God's work in Jesus.

Once this understanding of the hermeneutical lens provided by the Lukan introduction was in place, Chapters 3 and 4 examined twenty-three passages in the body of the Gospel that make connections—either explicit or implicit—between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions. The narrative reading of these texts built a cumulative picture of the intersection of economic motifs and the themes of reversal and right response. Within this picture, five interrelated and consistently visible Lukan emphases emerge.

First, we see that for Luke, the essential nature of discipleship is summarized in the pair of verbs, "leaving" and "following." Leaving includes a distancing of oneself from old sources of security and identity, especially wealth.

Second, it is clear that in Luke's Gospel "leaving" and "following" are the conditions for *all* disciples, not only for the Twelve or for some "professional" class of disciples. Thus, every right response to God's work in Jesus involves leaving behind the old relationship to wealth and possessions; this leaving is

expressed variously as giving, selling, renouncing, or using (to meet the needs of others).⁶

Third, the values that govern the behavior and practices of Jesus' followers in Luke are those of the eschatological kingdom,⁷ which reverse human norms, particularly that of reciprocity. The status-seeking practices of reciprocity are replaced with an ethic of persistent generosity and boundary-less hospitality.

Fourth, there is a significant difference in Luke's use of "rich" and "poor." The Evangelist always uses "rich" in the Gospel as an economic categorization, often with negative connotations. However, he employs "poor" in two distinct ways. As a descriptive term, "poor" can be a soteriological category, describing those who trust in God and risk or reject other sources of security because of their loyalty to Jesus. However, when the Lukan Jesus speaks prescriptively to disciples regarding their responsibilities, "the poor" are always the excluded and marginalized who are to be the special objects of disciples' generosity and hospitality. Part of right response to God's work in Jesus is right response to these poor.

Fifth, we see that God's clearly defined purpose for the use of surplus material resources (wealth) is that they be directed toward meeting the needs of others. The Lukan narrative presents no middle ground for disciples in their relationship to wealth and possessions; either they will hold their material resources lightly, easily releasing them to meet the needs of others (right response) or they will serve Lord Mammon, clutching material resources as a means of self-focused gain and status (wrong response).

In this cluster of emphases from Luke 5–24, we see that the threads of reversal and right response that were woven into the introduction continue to be intertwined with the motif of wealth and possessions. God, in Jesus, continues to be the agent of reversal and humans continue to be called to respond rightly to that new work. In the introductory unit, the emphasis was on responsiveness to the divine reversal among the poor and lowly; in the rest of the Gospel, that element remains present as many poor, humble persons respond positively to Jesus. At the same time, we have found that in the rest of the Gospel, there is an accompanying shift in the Evangelist's attention. Not only does he continue to highlight responsiveness *among* the poor and lowly; now he also

6 With Hays, our analysis has shown that renunciation is not the only appropriate expression of a disciple's response to his or her possessions; however, we have not found support in Luke's narrative for distributing such responses along Hays' continuum of "situational" categorizations; see the discussion in Chapter 3 above.

7 Like Secombe (*Possessions and the Poor*, 1982, especially 24–94) and Twelftree (*People of the Spirit*, 2009, especially 177–203), we have seen Jesus in Luke-Acts as God's eschatological agent of salvation, who brings good news to the poor. The impact of that eschatological reversal overflows in concrete, present response to the poor by Jesus' disciples.

focuses on actions, attitudes, and orientation *toward* those groups as demonstration of right response to the divine reversal.

Chapter 5 explored whether Luke's consistent interest in the intersection between the themes of reversal and right response and the motif of wealth and possessions is also present in his second volume. The narrative analysis of the relevant passages in Acts, where either a direct or indirection presentation of Luke's special interest is present, gives a clearly affirmative answer. All five of the emphases discerned in the Gospel are also present, either explicitly or implicitly, in Luke's portrait of the early church and its mission.

First, despite the lack of "leaving and following" vocabulary in Acts, the pattern of disciples (right responders) abandoning traditional sources of security is present in Luke's second volume as well. It is seen in general terms in Luke's portrait of Christian communities as places where private ownership is held lightly and readily sacrificed for the common good (Acts 2–5) and is particularized in specific cases throughout Luke's second volume.

Second, this "leaving" is a characteristic of all disciples in Acts, just as in the Gospel. The ethic of generous mutuality and complete trust in God's provision is not limited to the apostles or missionaries.

Third, the overturning of anti-kingdom economic values and practices, particularly reciprocity, also persists in Acts. This is seen not least in the boundary-less table fellowship that Luke insists was a defining characteristic of the Christian community. Also as in the Gospel, material possessions are not allowed to compete for disciples' loyalty. Though the vocabulary is different ("wealth" and "mammon" give way to talk of "profit" and "goods"), the focus remains the same: disciples must choose who or what will have the governance of their lives.

Fourth, Acts presents the same clear picture of the divine will for surplus economic resources (wealth) as in the Gospel: a charity that surpasses almsgiving through identification with the poor in barrier-less community, expressed especially through inclusive table fellowship. This is most evident in Acts in the summaries (Acts 2–5), but is also present throughout the book in Luke's narratives of the care for widows and the offering for famine victims. It is also observable in the expression of Paul's work ethic, which purposes not only self-support but the disposition of earnings on behalf of the needy.

Fifth, the poor-rich dichotomy of the Gospel is present in Acts as well, although the vocabulary changes.⁸ "Poor" (πτωχός) is replaced by "needy"

8 Here we concur with Tannehill, who also perceives the continuity in Luke's portrait of poor and rich across both volumes of his work. "Do the Ethics of Acts Include the Ethical Teaching in Luke?" In *Acts and Ethics*, ed. Thomas E. Phillips (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 109–122.

(τις χρείαν εἶχεν, 2:45; 4:35; ἐνδεής, 4:34) or is embodied in lame persons, widows, slaves, and famine victims,⁹ while the rich in Acts are presented as persons of high standing or referred to by prestigious titles. The greatest difference in Acts is that the portrait of this latter group is more nuanced than it was in the Gospel, with a greater number of wealthy individuals demonstrating a right response to the message of Jesus.

Taken together, these insights show that Luke's second volume portrays the economic aspects of discipleship in a way that is consistent with his Gospel. A right response to Jesus requires a loosening of the disciple's hold on material possessions, for the express purpose of meeting the needs of the poor. The community that bears Jesus' name and is empowered by his Spirit embodies the same behaviors and attitudes that characterized Jesus in the Third Gospel: a rejection of an ethic of reciprocity and an embrace of the poor through boundary-less unity within the community.¹⁰

Luke carefully designed his Gospel with a discernible literary structure: a prologue (1:1–4), an introductory unity (1:5–4:44), and a main narrative (Luke 5–24). When the introduction's role as hermeneutical key for the rest of the Gospel is recognized, the pattern that Luke establishes thus becomes a guide for the reader in the quest to understand the Evangelist's wealth ethic: the motif of wealth and possessions is intimately linked to the twin themes of reversal and right response. With that interpretive lens in place, Luke's frequent and diverse commentary on wealth and possessions in the Third Gospel is seen to be unified by the consistent presence of the five emphases outlined above. Those same emphases are also present in Luke's story of the early Jesus communities in Acts.

2 Moving Forward

This study raises further questions. There are at least two discernible pathways that beckon the interpreter toward additional exploration. The first pathway travels through the terrain of Luke studies. We have seen the power of Luke's carefully-designed introduction as a hermeneutical key for reading

9 Bergquist's observation is instructive here. He notes that while the specific poor-rich vocabulary of the Gospel is missing in Acts, the "possessions" terms from the first Lukan volume are also present in the second. "Good New to the Poor: Why Does This Lukan Motif Appear to Run Dry in the Book of Acts?" *Trinity Seminary Review* 9 (1987): 18–27.

10 Note Paul's commentary on his meeting with "the pillars" of the Jerusalem community: "They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do" (Gal 2:10). Luke insists that the early church's focus was squarely where Jesus' was—active concern for the poor.

the Evangelist's wealth ethic in the rest of Luke-Acts. Other important Lukan themes may be illuminated by careful attention to their presentation in the introductory unit and to the expectations Luke that creates about those themes. Recognizing Luke 1:5–4:44 as the interpretive lens for the rest of the Third Gospel opens the possibility for fruitful readings of other Lukan emphases that are established in the introductory unit:

- *The identity of Jesus.* The identity of Jesus as “Son of God” is probably the central question asked and answered in Luke 1–4. This provides an interpretive lens through which to understand the person and work of Jesus in the rest of Luke-Acts.¹¹ How might sustained and detailed observation of the sonship motif in Luke 1–4 illuminate the christology of the rest of the Gospel and Acts?
- *The nature of salvation.* Salvation terminology (σῶζω, σωτήρ, and σωτηρία) occurs seven times in Luke 1–4.¹² The words are clustered in songs, angelic speech, and Old Testament quotations. How might close attention to the “salvation” language and its narrative settings in Luke’s introduction enhance understanding of his soteriology in the rest of Luke-Acts?
- *The impact of Jesus on the non-Jewish world.* The presence of the non-Jewish world in the introduction is seen in Simeon’s song (2:29–32), in the Isaiah quotation that introduces John the Baptist’s mission (3:4–6), and in Jesus’ exposition of his own vocation (4:23–27). How might new analysis of Luke’s presentation of the non-Jewish world in the introduction shed new light on the question of the role of the Gentiles in the rest of Luke-Acts?
- *Luke’s definition of faith.* A response of faith to God’s announcement of the fulfillment of his promises in Jesus is modeled in Luke 1–4 by rather unheroic characters: Elizabeth (a barren woman); Mary (a peasant woman); Anna (a widow); and shepherds (less-than-elite witnesses). Simeon, an elderly male, is the only “dignified” example of a faithful responder in the Lukan introduction. How might a careful analysis of faith and faithful responses in Luke’s introduction provide a useful lens for understanding his portrait of faith in the rest of the Gospel and Acts?
- *The role of the Holy Spirit.* Appearing eleven times in Luke 1–4,¹³ the Holy Spirit remains in the background in the rest of the Gospel but emerges again in Acts as a main character. This may be of particular interest and importance for Pentecostal-charismatic interpreters, whose traditional

¹¹ See the discussion of sonship in Chapter 1.

¹² Luke 1:47, 69, 71, 77; 2:11, 30; 3:6.

¹³ Luke 1:16, 35; 2:25, 26, 27; 3:16, 22; 4:1[×2], 14, 18.

hermeneutical key is the ascension-Pentecost narrative of Acts 1–2.¹⁴ How might their pneumatological readings of Luke-Acts be enhanced and made more robust by allowing the programmatic portrait of the Spirit in Luke 1–4 to establish their interpretive grid?

The second pathway for fruitful exploration leads back to where this project began: the reading and appropriation of Luke's writing within the community of faith. Just as it was the experience of reading of Luke and Acts in community that generated the initial question behind this project, it is to that kind of reading that we return.¹⁵ The issue explored in these chapters is woven so tightly to the life of discipleship that it begs not to remain as a purely academic quest. And given Luke's polyphonic and diverse portrait of discipleship in the early church, painted in a narrative directed to privileged readers but with a pressing concern for the marginalized in the community, it may be that any appropriate corporate response will require hearing Luke's voice from a diversity of interpretive perspectives. Perhaps it will require privileged readers to listen carefully and intentionally to the insights of Majority World brothers and sisters as they read Luke together, and vice versa.¹⁶

14 See, for example, Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), and Kevin L. Spawn and Archie T. Wright, *Spirit and Scripture: Examining a Pneumatic Hermeneutic* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

15 N. T. Wright provides two particularly fine examples of this kind of "bridge" between the academy and the church, with his *New Testament for Everyone* series, published by Westminster John Knox Press, and the distillation of his massive *Christian Origins and the Question of God* trilogy (Fortress) into a series of smaller, more accessible volumes published by Harper One (*Simply Jesus*, 2011; *How God Became King*, 2012; *The Case for the Psalms*, 2013; *Surprised by Scripture*, 2014; *Simply Good News*, 2017). Another excellent example of such bridge-building from exegesis and analysis to the life of the church, especially relevant to this project, is the final chapter in Sondra Ely Wheeler's *Wealth as Peril and Obligation*, in which she uses the findings of the previous eight chapters to pose "questions intended for the ongoing examination of the community's life. They serve to reframe our twentieth-century inquiries about the ethics of property into the form in which the New Testament is prepared to entertain them, the form in which their theological significance is clear and central" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 137.

16 A wonderful starting point for readers unfamiliar with Majority World perspectives (e.g., liberation, Latino/a, Africana or feminist hermeneutics) would be Father Ernesto Cardenal's transcriptional report of his studies of the Gospels with Nicaraguan *campesinos* (poor farmers and villagers). E. Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010). Voices that might prove helpful as introductions to Majority World hermeneutics include Esa Autero, José Míguez Bonino, Miguel de la Torre, Elsa Támez, and Liz Theoharris; see their representative works in the bibliography.

This writer inhabits geographically the context of the North American church, but with a heart, mind, and perspective shaped and challenged by the faithful witness of beloved fellow disciples in Majority World context. The following suggestions and interrogatives flow out of that experience. It is my strong sense that the five Lukan emphases that we have identified will find their most fruitful expression when turned into questions for the contemporary church as it reads Luke-Acts:¹⁷

- In the context of the 21st-century North American church, what are the implications of discipleship defined as “leaving and following,” and what will it look like for disciples who inhabit places of power and privilege to distance themselves from old sources of security and identity, particularly their wealth? What will it look like for disciples who inhabit the margins of society?
- Luke’s call is for disciples to have a new and different relationship with their possessions, expressed variously as giving, selling, renouncing, or using (to meet the needs of others). What are the implications of that point for both personal and ecclesial budgets and practices?
- The values of God’s eschatological kingdom are embodied in Luke-Acts through persistent generosity and boundary-less hospitality. What are the implications for discipleship in a society where individualism and protectionism shape the dominant cultural ethos, where the nuclear family is the most important relational unit, and where the current socio-political climate creates rather than diminishes boundaries among groups of people?
- Luke uses “poor” as both a soteriological category and an economic descriptor. How can the church in the North American context live *as* “the poor” in the soteriological sense—demonstrating radical dependence on God and rejecting other sources of security—and at the same time live *for* “the poor”—the excluded and marginalized—with gospel generosity and hospitality?
- In a culture where people must park in their driveways because their three-car garages are full of “stuff” and where growing numbers of facilities exist to provide rented storage space for people’s excess possessions, will the church allow itself to be confronted with Luke’s stark dichotomy concerning surplus material possessions? How will the North American church navigate the no-middle-ground ethos of the Third Gospel? Only two options are offered by Luke: either disciples will hold their material resources lightly,

17 These questions are formulated for and from within the context of the 21st-century North American church. Both the formulation of the questions and the answers they generate may take on different nuances for the church in other cultural contexts.

with a constant disposition to release them for meeting the needs of others, or they will clutch them with a tight grip, effectively rendering service to Mammon rather than to God. What are the practical implications of this for ecclesial communities, Christian families, and individual followers of Jesus?

This journey began with the question of whether Luke has a consistent ethic of wealth and possessions. The Evangelist's introductory unit (Luke 1:5–4:44) provides the interpretive lens for the investigation of this question, as the introduction consistently pairs the motif of wealth and possessions with the twin themes of reversal and right response. Reading Luke 5–24 and Acts through that programmatic hermeneutical lens, we can discern clearly the presence of a cluster of Lukan emphases that characterize his perspective on wealth and possessions across both volumes of his work. For Luke, discipleship at its core is a matter of “leaving and following,” distancing oneself from all other sources of security and identity, including wealth and its accompanying status. All disciples of Jesus, not just “specialists,” are called to this kind of leaving of material wealth, through acts of giving, selling, renouncing, and using possessions to meet the needs of others. Such actions flow out of and are an expression of the values of God's eschatological kingdom, establishing a community that reflects the life and ministry of Jesus, God's eschatological agent; in such a community, status-seeking norms and practices are replaced with an incarnated ethic of persistent generosity and boundary-less hospitality. Right response to God's in-breaking kingdom includes a right use of material possessions: to meet the needs of the poor. The two-volume Lukan narrative presents no middle ground for followers of Jesus in their relationship with wealth and possessions: either they will hold them lightly, with a constant disposition to make them available for meeting the needs of the poor, or they will clutch them tightly and thus reveal the lordship of mammon rather than that of Jesus in their lives.

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